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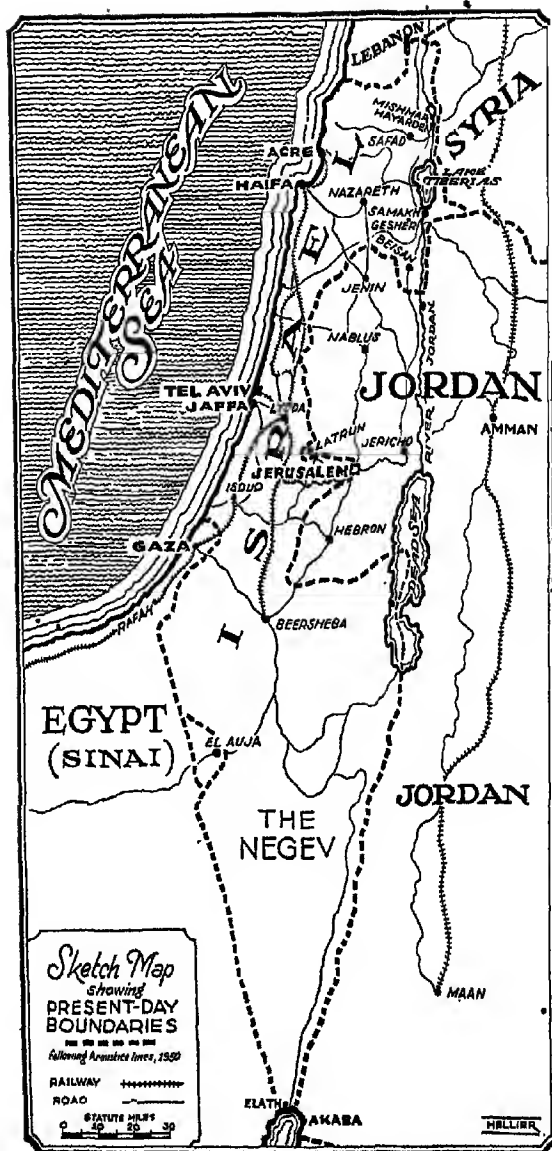
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THE ARAB-ISRAELI WAR  
1948



# The Arab-Israeli War

## 1948

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by  
EDGAR O'BALLANCE

FABER AND FABER LIMITED  
24 Russell Square  
London

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*First published in mcmxvi  
by Faber and Faber Limited  
24 Russell Square London W.C.1  
Printed in Great Britain by  
Latimer Trend & Co Ltd Plymouth  
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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Considerable help has been given to me in writing this book, which is primarily for the military student, by many, many people. As it is not possible for me to thank them all individually in print, I do so now collectively.





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## PREFACE

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As an introduction it is perhaps helpful to consider briefly for a moment the military background of the Arabs and the Jews who were the combatants in the fighting that took place in Palestine in 1948.

(The Arabs rose to be a military power quite suddenly in the seventh century, when a number of Arabian tribes, welded together and inflamed with religious zeal by the Prophet Mohammed, set out to convert or conquer the infidel. Then soldiering became, not only the noblest profession in the sight of Allah, but also the most profitable, as the Arab soldier was assured of his share of loot.)

After the death of the Prophet, the brilliant campaigns of Khalid Ibn-al-Walid and Amr Ibn-al-As, the first two Arab generals, resulted in the conquest of Syria, Iraq and Egypt, and heralded the rise and advance of militant Islam. In August 636, Khalid defeated the Byzantine army at Yarmuk, driving the Romans from the field of battle, before moving on to complete his conquest of Syria. Jerusalem fell in 638.

While this was happening the other Arab general, Amr, headed for Egypt sweeping all before him, first taking Port Said before going on to win a pitched battle against the Romans near Cairo and eventually to force the Governor of Alexandria, a walled and fortified naval base, to make a treaty with him.

Victoriously, the Arabs went from strength to strength, being checked only at Constantinople, which held out against them. Finding they could make no headway there they wasted no

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time but expanded westwards along the northern coast of Africa. In the year 711 they crossed over the Straits of Gibraltar to sweep through Spain, and they had begun to swarm over the Pyrenees before they were finally halted by Charles Martel on French soil. As their conquests increased, with their policy of forcible conversion their ranks swelled and they were joined by all races and nations; the Islamic movement became progressively more cosmopolitan.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the battles between the Arabs and the Crusaders were often long and fierce. At first the Muslims were driven back, but later they recovered and under their leader, Saladin, defeated the Christians. In 1187 Saladin captured Tiberias after a six-day siege, and in the same year met the Crusader army at Hattin, where he completely defeated it; the whole Christian force, nearly 20,000 strong, fell into his hands. Next he moved to Jerusalem which surrendered to him after a week's siege.

But the zenith had been reached; and in the early thirteenth century Ghengis Khan appeared from the east, burning, looting, killing, and as he advanced the Arab Empire began to disintegrate before him. For the next few centuries the Arab tribes and nations spent most of their time fighting against each other, raiding and being raided. Owing to their mobility and inaccessibility, the Turks, who in time became their nominal overlords, were never able to control them. They rode their camels through the uncharted deserts like pirates roaming the seas, suddenly appearing to loot a village and then to disappear before the Turkish troops could move against them. But the advent of the motor vehicle which could move across deserts even faster than a camel, and above all of the aeroplane, gradually brought the Arabs under some sort of control, although their warlike spirit and tendencies still remained.

Today, the term 'Arab' in the popular sense covers a wide number of peoples of the Islamic faith, including those in Syria, the Lebanon, Palestine, and even Egypt, but of course the true Arab originates from the nomadic tribes of the deserts and has a fine fighting heritage. But generally there is a strong tradition

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of courage and of soldierly instinct among the various nations of the Middle East, both in the cities and the deserts, which is kept alive by the common bond which they have in their language, Arabic.

The Jewish fighting man is not nearly so well known, but he has a splendid tradition as a soldier going back to Biblical days when the Israelites fought against the Philistines, the Canaanites, the Moabites, the Edomites, the Ammonites and other surrounding tribes and cities. The Bible is full of stories of their battles.

Under King David's rule the Israelite soldier was feared and respected throughout the Middle East but in time the Jewish kingdoms declined and eventually the Romans became the masters of Palestine. But the fighting spirit of the Jews was not crushed and the Zealots, who were militant Pharisees, revolted, seizing various forts and towns, including the capital, Jerusalem. For eighteen months the Romans hammered away at the city walls and only retook it after desperate building-to-building fighting. When Titus finally overran it the only Jews who had given up the fight were those who could no longer stand.

Later, in A.D. 132, there was another Jewish revolt under Bar Kochba, which took the Romans three years to get under control. After this the Diaspora became a fact and the remnants of the Jewish nation were scattered to the four corners of the earth. With it disappeared the Jewish soldier and in the centuries that followed the world forgot him.

It was not until 1794 that he came to the fore again in Poland, when a Jewish leader, Berek Joselowicz, formed a Jewish legion of 500 volunteers, and led them in a revolt against the Russians. When regular Russian troops were sent against them the Jewish soldiers fought to the bitter end and there were only twenty survivors.

It is not generally known that an all-Jewish unit fought at Waterloo, losing thirty-five officers and over 200 men. Napoleon had raised it in Batavia in 1809, and it served him faith-



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fully to the end. A few years later in the Polish revolt of 1830-1 another regiment of Jews, 800 strong, was formed and fought against the Russians; it evoked admiration from the Poles, themselves notable fighters. But by this time Jewish units had begun to make their appearance in armies and on battlefields generally, although often their efforts were minimized or ignored.

In the two World Wars large numbers of Jews served in the armed forces of the various countries that took part on both sides (except, of course, Nazi Germany). Their bravery did not go unrecognized and, to quote but one example, in the Second World War over 25,000 decorations for bravery were awarded to Jews serving in the American Forces.

The Jewish soldier has reappeared, perhaps without the world being fully conscious of it, and the war in Palestine merely emphasized and brought the fact into prominence.

# I

## PALESTINE

---

For centuries Palestine has been regarded as sacred by three of the great religions of the world, the Christian, the Jewish and the Muslim. Almost from the dawn of recorded history it has been a battle ground, where passions, fanned by religious zeal, have added impetus to fierce struggles.

To Christians, Palestine is sacred because it was the scene of the birth, sufferings, and death of Christ, and contained all the 'Holy Places'. To Jews everywhere, it is always their 'Promised Land', to which Mōses led them from bondage in Egypt, and they believe that their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, lie buried beneath the floor of the Mosque at Hebron. While to Muslims, the followers of Mohammed, it is second only in holiness to the towns of Mecca and Medina, as their tradition has it that the Prophet was transported from Mecca to Jerusalem in a day, before ascending into Paradise, from the spot on which now stands the Mosque of Omar. The Muslims accept Moses, Christ and Mohammed as prophets.

The name 'Palestine' comes from the Hebrew 'Pelescheth', and means 'Land of the Philistines'. Previously, it was known as Canaan, and was inhabited by a number of independent tribes, probably all Semitic.

In Biblical times, the Israelites came into Palestine from southern Jordan, and they advanced and conquered the territory of the Canaanites west of the River Jordan. As the former inhabitants were not completely subjugated and retained possession of a number of their cities, the twelve tribes of the Jews settled in districts which were often more or less cut off

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from one another. They became in fact a loose federation of patriarchal tribes, at times often hard pressed by the Canaanites. As time went on the territory of the Canaanites, as well as the people themselves, began to merge with that of the Israelites.

Before the Israelites had settled down and achieved local dominance, the Philistines appeared and seriously challenged their supremacy. The Philistines were generally a little more advanced than most of the pastoral peoples in that part of the world, and it is believed that they came from Crete. They certainly had a knowledge of metals and are credited with originating the art of the smith. At first they occupied the ancient cities of Gaza, Gath, Askelon, Ashdod and Ekron, forming a confederacy under five chiefs. For generations they fought against the Israelites, each side having varying fortunes. The Philistines rose to the height of their power in the reign of the Hebrew king, Saul.

After the death of Solomon, two rival Jewish kingdoms were set up, that of Judea being based on Jerusalem, and that of Israel being based on Samaria. They fought fitfully against each other, and against the many enemies that beset them. While these two Hebrew states occupied the hill plateau, the Philistines and the Phoenicians occupied the central plain. First the kingdom of Israel grew powerful and then waned and fell, most of its inhabitants eventually being taken prisoner by the Assyrians. Later, the kingdom of Judea likewise declined after a period of influence, and Jerusalem was captured and destroyed in 588 B.C., by Nebuchadnezzar. The Jews were carried into captivity where 'they sat down by the waters of Babylon and wept'.

The Assyrian empire gave way to that of the Persians', and after being in captivity for slightly less than fifty years, the Persian king allowed such Jews as wished to return to rebuild Jerusalem. About 42,000 of them chose to do so, only to find that Palestine was still a turbulent land where every man's hand was against them, and they 'builted with a sword girt by their side' of a stern necessity. Although claiming sovereignty over Palestine at this period, Persian rule was not always effective,

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the inhabitants being constantly engaged in quarrels and factions. The returned Jews lived as nominal Persian subjects, retaining their own customs and religious freedom.

When Alexander the Great overthrew the Persian Empire he promised the Jews that they would be allowed to practise their religion freely, in return for which they submitted to his overlordship. In the division of his possessions at his death, Palestine fell to the Ptolemies of Egypt, under whom it enjoyed a spell of prosperity. After the death of Ptolemy, the Graccho-Syrian king, Antiochus the Great, became the master of the country, and as a result an 'Egyptian' and a 'Syrian' party arose amongst the Jews, causing civil disturbances to break out. To settle these, Antiochus invaded Judea and slaughtered the Jews indiscriminately.

Jewish resistance followed his occupation, in which the Maccabee family took a prominent lead. After some years their struggle was successful, and in 135 B.C., John Hyrcanus, one of the Maccabees, completed the independence of Judea, and extended his rule over the ancient limits of Palestine. It was during his reign that the two rival sects, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, became established as powerful political parties.

In 63 B.C. the Pharisees called on the Romans to help them against the Sadducees, and Pompey, taking Jerusalem, made all Palestine subject to Rome. Afterwards, Herod the Great, a Jew who had adopted Roman manners and had cultivated the favour of his masters, was recognized as 'King of Judea' by the Roman Senate, and it was during his reign, in the year 4 B.C., that the birth of Christ took place at Bethlehem. In A.D. 6 Judea and Samaria became a Roman province under a procurator, and, as a matter of interest, Pontius Pilate was appointed the procurator in A.D. 26.

The Jews rose in revolt against the Romans, in A.D. 69, and this resulted in a full-scale campaign being waged against them, which ended in the capture and destruction of Jerusalem. On the ruins of the former Jewish capital, the Roman Tenth Legion established its camp. This was a severe blow as it deprived them of their symbolic centre of resistance.

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Another Jewish rising took place some years later, and Palestine was seething in the throes of active rebellion between the years A.D. 132 and 135. When the Emperor Hadrian eventually got the country under control again, he razed to the ground what little was left of Jerusalem and erected a new city on the site into which Jews were forbidden to enter on pain of death.

Next, Palestine fell to the fanatical hordes of Arabs, advancing under the new, triumphant banner of Islam. The battle of the River Yarmuk, in A.D. 636, was followed shortly afterwards by the capitulation of Jerusalem, and the country settled down to a period of Muslim rule.

As time went on the severities of the Muslims towards the Christians in Palestine, and the humiliating fact that infidels were in possession of the holy places, led to the Crusades. These at first had some success, and after the taking of Jerusalem by the Crusaders, a Christian kingdom was established. But in 1187, when Saladin won the battle of Hattin, the collapse of the Christian resistance was so complete that within three years only Antioch, Tyre and Tripolis remained to them. In spite of almost superhuman efforts to recover the Holy Land from the infidel, they did not make much headway, and the Treaty of 1195 left them with just the seaboard from Acre to Jaffa.

Under the Mamelukes, who supplanted the dynasty of Saladin, Egypt and Syria (of which Palestine was a part) formed one united kingdom for 267 years. During that time it was unsuccessfully attacked by the Crusaders, by the Mongols under Hualagu, the grandson of Genghis Khan, and by Tamerlane. In 1517 Palestine fell to the Osmanli Turks, under whose rule it remained for exactly 400 years, until it was taken by the British Empire Forces in 1917 and 1918, Jerusalem formally surrendering to General Allenby on 9th December 1917.)

( Meanwhile, what could loosely be called 'the Jewish Question' began to be troublesome. Nearly all the Jewish race was scattered to the four corners of the world, but in spite of persecution and lack of security, a small number of Jews had stayed on in their Promised Land, living a miserable and abject existence. )

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! In 1897 a Viennese Jew, Theodor Herzl, founded the 'Zionist Organization', which became a world association of Jews. Herzl was convinced that the only hope of refuge from the widespread hatred and persecution suffered by Jews generally was for them to have a land of their own, and he decided—after having considered several other possibilities—that Palestine was that land.) The Zionist Organization quickly won widespread support, especially in eastern Europe where the persecution was most severe, and Herzl soon established centres in all countries where there was a Jewish community. (To further his object, he contacted the Sultan of Turkey, but found him both unsympathetic and unco-operative.)

( But he found sympathy for his ideal in Great Britain, a country which had been less harsh in its dealings with the Jews throughout the ages than most, and whose conscience was clearest.) Britain held a protectorate over Egypt and offered to let Herzl establish a Jewish community in the Sinai, near the borders of Palestine. In those days that was the best she could do. But advance parties reported that the land was unsuitable for development, and the project was dropped.

After the Boer War, Chamberlain, in his travels, came upon the large, empty country of Uganda, with its great unrealized potential, and it immediately occurred to him that here might be a suitable spot to establish a Jewish state. This idea became known as the 'Uganda Project'. He suggested this to Herzl, who viewed the project favourably, particularly as his negotiations with the Sultan had fallen through. But when he put the suggestion to the Zionist Congress, the eastern European delegates turned it down flat. For them it was Palestine or nothing.

( In the meantime, the Zionist Organization turned to practical matters and in the face of Turkish disapproval got on as best it could with the establishment of Jewish settlements in Palestine.) Money was limited, and the conditions of the early settlers severe and discouraging, but a number of them stuck to their ideal in the face of all opposition.

That was the situation at the outbreak of war in 1914.

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Fighting for her very existence, Britain was only too anxious to enlist the support of both Arabs and Jews, a fact which, unfortunately, led British statesmen to give contrary impressions to each community.)

( Britain had always been sympathetic towards the idea of a national home for the Jews, and in return for their financial and economic support, which was given wholeheartedly, Britain promised to sponsor the founding of a 'Jewish National Home', in Palestine after the Turks had been defeated. This was announced in the ambiguously worded 'Balfour Declaration', which promised the Jews a 'national home' only, adding that nothing must infringe on the existing rights of any of the inhabitants. The word 'state' was not mentioned. In spite of its vagueness it was accepted in good faith by the Jews as a declaration of British policy after the war. )

(The small number of Jews who had already settled there turned to aid Britain,) and Captain Trumpeldor, in 1915, made a start by organizing the Zion Mule Corps, which fought in the Dardenelles campaign. Then Vladimir Jabotinsky, aided by Ben Zvi, and later by Trumpeldor, organized the Jewish Legion in Britain. This consisted of the 38th, 39th, 40th and 42nd battalions of the Royal Fusiliers, and was ready in sufficient time to take part, under General Allenby, in the final phases of the war in the Middle East.

( But Arab help was also needed, and Britain and France made a joint declaration to them to the effect that their object was 'the complete and definite emancipation of the peoples so long oppressed by the Turks and the establishment of national governments and administrations deriving their authority from the initiative and free choice of their indigenous population'. In correspondence and talks between British Government representatives and Arab leaders, including the Sherif Hussein of Mecca, one of the most prominent, the Arabs got the impression that Palestine was to be included in the promised areas of Arab independence, and would, after the Turkish defeat, be an Arab state. Although this was not actually published in so many words, the impression was there and the

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British did nothing to dispel it. In return, the Arabs gave Britain certain measures of support, the most publicized being the Arab Revolt under Lawrence. These two separate undertakings, so contradictory, were the cause of most of the subsequent trouble and misunderstanding. )

After the war ended, on 11th November 1918, Palestine was governed for a time by the military, but on 1st July 1920 it was handed over to a civil administration, and Sir Herbert Samuel became the first High Commissioner.

Both Arabs and Jews impatiently waited for the implementation of their promises, and trouble broke out almost at once. Palestine was given to Great Britain under a mandate from the League of Nations, and in spite of Muslim protests the 'Balfour Declaration' was written into this mandate, which also provided for a Jewish Agency to represent the opinions and views of the Jews, and the existing Zionist Organization in Palestine was accepted as such. The mandate was of the 'A' class, which meant that the country was to become self-governing, and the Palestine Arabs thought that it meant that in due course it would become a fully-fledged, self-governing Arab state, as had been promised.

The Treaties of Sèvres 1920 and of Lausanne 1923 provided for the abandonment by the Ottoman Empire of all sovereign rights over the Holy Land, and this caused some political controversy in the British Empire, which had repercussions in the disturbances in India in 1921 and 1922. Palestine had been conquered partly with the assistance of Indian Muslim troops who, before entering into a war with Turkey and agreeing to serve in arms not only against men of their own faith but against the Kaliph of Islam, whom they mentioned in their prayers, had first demanded a British guarantee for the integrity of the Sultanate and for the preservation of their holy places to their recognized Kaliph. These guarantees had been given to them by Lloyd George, who was subsequently a party to the partition of Turkey, which raised such a storm of dissidence in the Muslim world.

(In Palestine, the Arabs at once objected to the inclusion of



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the Balfour Declaration, and anti-Jewish riots broke out in May 1921. After these disturbances, the first of a long series of committees was appointed.)

The Zionists went ahead with their plans and the Jewish population, which was 60,000 in 1920, rose to 108,000 by 1925, the new immigrants being mostly young, energetic and politically minded. The authority of the Zionist Organization was firmly established and was fortified by the financial resources of the Jewish National Fund, which bought land and got on with the business of settling the immigrants on it. The completely new and modern town of Tel Aviv was rising from the sands, just to the north of the Arab port of Jaffa.

After 1925, in which year there was an economic crisis in eastern Europe, Jewish immigration declined and unemployment swelled. In 1927, for instance, emigration was double that of immigration. However, in spite of the hardships suffered by the early settlers at this time, the period was free from disturbances. Presumably the Arabs thought that the decline of the Jewish National Home had already set in and they were content to let it disintegrate by itself.

A revival began in 1928, bringing into being an enlarged Jewish Agency, embracing World Zionists as well as those in Palestine. The next year saw an outbreak of violence in August, aroused by an incident connected with the Wailing Wall, which, fanned by religious fanaticism, swept the country. Everywhere, the Arabs turned against the Jews. In 1933, Hitler came to power and Jewish immigration increased, the total numbers coming in for the two years 1934 and 1935 being over 100,000. This caused the Arabs to become anxious lest they should soon find themselves a minority.

Riots in Jaffa, in April 1935, developed into a country-wide Arab revolt, organized by the Mufti of Jerusalem, their religious leader, who fully realized the significance of the increasing Jewish flood of immigration. The rebellion turned a benevolent autocracy into a police state, and forty fortress-like blockhouses—cum-police stations were erected at strategic points to control the Arab bands that roamed the country preying on

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isolated Jewish settlements. Arab animosity was by now fully aroused against the Jews.

The Haganah, which was the Jewish defence force, a sort of Home Guard, mobilized to protect the settlements, but remained on the defensive, as the Jewish Agency leaders had set themselves against a policy of retaliation. But a Jewish extremist underground organization, the Irgun Zvai Leumi (I.Z.L.), dissented from this attitude, and hit back at the Arabs.

In an attempt to find a peaceful solution, Britain put forward a Partition Plan in 1937, but immediately ran into difficulties over the allocation of Jerusalem, the Negev and western Galilee. In the early part of the century the main weight and influence of World Zionism came from Europe, but that had been changing since the war of 1914-18, and by this time it was American Jewry which had gained most of the authority in the Zionist movement. Accordingly, the Jews in Palestine had a valuable and powerful advocate to put forward their views, which they did in no uncertain terms about the Partition Plan.

The Arab revolt had gradually petered out by 1939, and one of the many committees that had been appointed issued a report which was adopted by the British Government. This became known as the 'White Paper of 1939'. It stated that the cause of the Arab unrest was the rate of Jewish immigration, and it made proposals to limit the expansion of the Jewish National Home and also restricted land purchase by them. Jewish immigration was to be limited to 75,000, to be spread over five years. While this did little to appease the Arabs, it aroused the suspicions of the Jews, and the Jewish dissident organization, the I.Z.L., began to direct its activities against the British.

When the Second World War broke out, the Jews in Palestine came in wholeheartedly on the side of Britain against Hitler. The Jewish Agency registered both men and women for service with the British Forces, as well as making a huge war contribution in the fields of agriculture and commerce. The dissident organization suspended its subversive efforts. The Palestine

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Jews offered to form a Jewish Brigade, and the British Cabinet agreed in principle in 1941, but nothing was done for some time for fear of arousing Arab suspicions. It was not until September 1944 that this Brigade came into being.

The response from the Palestinian Arabs was not so good in spite of the considerable efforts that were made to recruit them. About 9,000 Arabs were enlisted into Palestinian units, but the majority were drawn from the neighbouring states of Syria, the Lebanon and Trans-Jordan, and the rate of desertions was high. In contrast, the Jewish Agency had registered over 130,000 Jews, of whom about 30,000 were enlisted and trained as fighting troops. For a period, Jewish recruiting was ordered to be slowed down to the same rate as that of the Arabs, in order not to provide any provocation or to alarm them unduly.

The reasons for the poor Arab response were perhaps not hard to seek. The Arab rebellion had just been put down very firmly by British troops, their leaders were out of sympathy with democratic ideals, and the Arab states, with the exception of Trans-Jordan, were indifferent. Their natural leaders, such as the Mufti of Jerusalem, who might have been persuaded to rally them to the British cause, had mostly been driven into exile, where from nearby capitals they continued to intrigue against the British Government and its war effort.

However, Trans-Jordan formed a pleasant exception to the surly attitude of the majority of the Arab countries, and on the day war broke out the country unreservedly placed all its resources at the disposal of Britain. Throughout the war, the Arab Legion voluntarily fought by the side of the British Army and operated under its command. In 1941 when Britain's fortunes were at their lowest ebb and she was fighting alone, the Emir Abdullah sent his troops to accompany the British column on its march on Baghdad, when they fought against fellow Arabs for the British cause. Shortly afterwards the Arab Legion also joined British troops in driving the Vichy French out of Syria. For the remainder of the war Abdullah's men garrisoned camps and bases all over the Middle East, thus releasing at least one British division to go off and fight in Europe.

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In 1942, the 'Biltmore Programme' was announced by a conference of Zionist leaders and openly expressed their new aim of a Jewish state in Palestine. Meanwhile, in view of their oil wealth and their strategic position, Britain favoured the formation of a League of Arab States, with the object of fitting them into the pattern of the Middle East defence, and many Jewish ideals tended to be shelved to further this purpose.

Even though the war against Germany was still being fought, the I.Z.L. renewed its anti-British activities, concentrating at first on stealing arms and ammunition. But they soon resorted to violence. In February 1944 they bombed the Immigration Offices in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa. In March 1944 the C.I.D. offices in Haifa and Jaffa were blown up; in April 1944 the Government Broadcasting Station, at Ramallah, was seized; while in August of that year an attempt was made to murder the High Commissioner, Sir Harold McMichael. And so the long catalogue of outrages and acts of terrorism began.

(With victory came the full realization of the unbelievable tragedy of the wholesale massacre of the Jews in Europe. The unpopular Palestine White Paper of 1939, restricting Jewish immigration, was still in force, but Zionist impatience was sharpened by their contact with the concentration camp survivors, who had no wish to stay where they had suffered so much, and who wanted to build their lives afresh in the Promised Land. Britain was pressed to issue 100,000 immigration 'certificates' to allow that number of Jews to enter Palestine immediately, but the Arabs strongly resisted any increase in the quota. Britain hesitated.)

On 4th October 1945, the Haganah Mobile Radio Transmitter (The Voice of Israel), which had been silent since the outbreak of war, opened up and began operations again, and the Jewish Resistance Movement came into being. From then onwards the Jews in Palestine were almost in a state of open rebellion against the Mandatory Government. The year 1946 was one of terrorism and lawlessness. In that year, 28 policemen and 45 British soldiers were killed, and many more were injured, as well as there being over 300 Arab and Jewish

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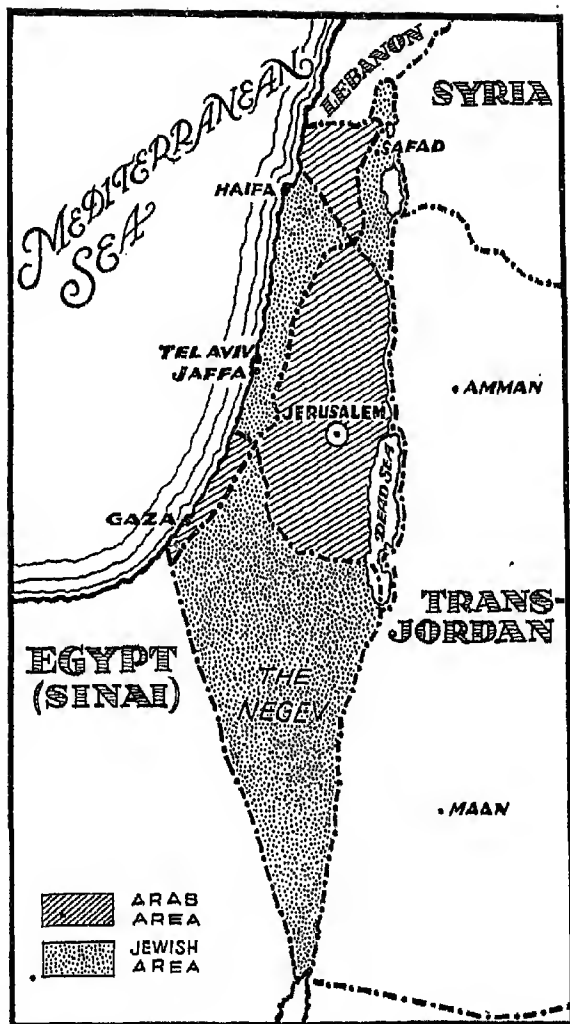
casualties, without a single person being brought to justice for any of these crimes. Public order was at a low ebb by the New Year of 1947, and on January 31st the British Government ordered women and children and certain civilians to be evacuated.

The attitude of the Jews and the Arabs was clearly irreconcilable, and Palestine had degenerated into a state of anarchy and chaos, with outrage, murder and acts of terrorism as everyday happenings. The country was reluctantly policed by the British Army, whose soldiers were only too anxious to be rid of such an uncongenial task. Eventually an exasperated and harassed British Government decided to resign the mandate. A complete deadlock had been reached by February and the British, no longer willing to share the burden and the odium alone, referred the problem to the United Nations which had assumed the responsibilities of the defunct League of Nations. On 2nd April 1947, the British delegate formally requested the Secretary-General to set up a special committee to study the Palestine problem. This was done, and the committee was ordered to report their findings by September 1st that year.

As soon as the decision to give up the mandate was made, the British Army gradually started to withdraw, in preparation for evacuation. It concentrated at the ports, in Jerusalem and at other strategic points, and large areas were handed over to the Jews and to the Arabs to police.

The committee which had been set up to examine the Palestine problem reported, and on 29th November 1947 a Resolution was passed in the General Assembly of the United Nations, approving its recommendation, which, in short, was partition, giving Jerusalem an international status. The division was unpopular, especially with the Arabs, and its approval by the U.N. proved to be the signal for war. Attacks on the British Security Forces, except to gain arms and ammunition, ceased and the two factions concentrated on preparing for the struggle ahead.

On the morning of 14th May 1948 the British High Commissioner left Jerusalem by air for Haifa, where he em-



Palestine. The U.N. Partition Plan, 29th November, 1947

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barked on a warship, and the main bulk of the remaining British troops left the country the same day, only a small body staying in the dock area of Haifa. These left on 30th June 1948.

The British mandate ended at midnight on May 14th, but already in the afternoon the *de facto* State of Israel had come into being, and was recognized by the United States of America only minutes later. So the country that for centuries had been known as Palestine was once more plunged into a desperate, bloody struggle, this time between the Israelis and the Arabs.

## II

# THE WAR BEGINS

---

**T**he Israel-Arab War can properly be said to have begun on 29th November 1947, when the General Assembly of the United Nations passed their resolution on the partitioning of Palestine. It was from that date that the Jews and the Arabs began to fight each other seriously, instead of merely spasmodically as formerly, and they both came to regard the mandatory power as being of secondary importance in the struggle between them, a sort of 'Third Force' which hovered menacingly in the background. By this time, even the most suspicious could no longer doubt that Britain was about to lay down the mandate for good.

The war can be divided into clear phases, which can be classed as follows:

*1st phase.* From 29th November 1947 until May 14th, which was the end of the mandate, during which occurred a period of semi-underground fighting.

*2nd phase.* From May 14th until June 11th, during which occurred the invasions of the regular armies of the Arab states.

*3rd phase.* From June 11th until July 9th, which was the period of the first truce.

*4th phase.* From July 9th until July 18th, popularly referred to as the 'Ten Days' Offensive'.

*5th phase.* From July 18th until October, which was the period of the second truce.

*6th phase.* The October fighting, which covers the renewal of the Israeli-Egyptian fighting in the south, and the Galilee campaign against Kaukji.



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. *7th phase.* The final action of the war, which ends with the signing of the various armistice agreements.

The United Nations' partition resolution, which was the result of the special committee which had been set up to study the Palestine problem, immediately aroused bitter Arab animosity. The difficulty, as before and always, was over the allocation of the Negev, western Galilee and Jerusalem. This time western Galilee and the Negev had been given to the Jews, which was the primary cause of Arab dislike. Furthermore, the boundaries had been drawn rather arbitrarily and thoughtlessly, many Arab villages being cut off from their farm lands and grazing pastures. The Arabs referred to it as the 'Death of a Thousand Cuts'. About the resolution as a whole, the Arabs were unanimous in roundly condemning it, while Jewish opinions were divided, and although none were wholeheartedly for it, Jerusalem being the sore point, it was dubiously accepted, chiefly because it gave legality to a Jewish state.

There were about 600,000 Jews in Palestine in November 1947, of whom just over half were in the three cities of Tel Aviv (150,000), New Jerusalem (100,000) and Haifa (80,000). About half the remainder were distributed in rural agricultural settlements, while the other half formed communities in the smaller towns, such as Safad and Tiberias. Throughout Palestine, except for the central plain north of Tel Aviv, the inhabitants were predominantly Arab, especially in the hill plateau stretching northwards from Jerusalem, where both the landowners and the peasants were strongly nationalistic and had steadfastly refused to sell land to the Jews. Elsewhere such rigidly patriotic views had not always prevailed and in many Arab areas there were Jewish settlements. These Jewish settlements, as the rural agricultural communities were known, were widely scattered, there being 35 in the Valley of Esdraelon, 150 on the coastal plain, 40 in the hill country, 49 in the northern region of the Jordan Valley, one at the northern end of the Dead Sea, and 17 in the Negev.

The practical Arab reaction to the unpopular resolution was for the Mufti of Jerusalem, who was then in Damascus, to

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order a three-day strike, followed by demonstrations. On December 2nd riots broke out in Jerusalem, where Arab rioters burnt a Jewish shopping quarter and did other extensive damage. During these disturbances, the Jews complained loudly of what they called the 'complaisant attitude of the British Security Forces'. Unfortunately there was some truth in their allegations that the police and the military did no more than was their strict duty on this occasion. Since the end of the Second World War, the Jews by their actions had given the individual members of the security forces little cause to gain their affection, and during that period 127 British soldiers had been killed and 331 injured by Jewish terrorists. Things had reached such a pitch that the reason for their 'apathy', and their reluctance to rush forward to defend Jewish property or to exert themselves over and above the bare call of duty was not hard to seek.

On December 4th, Jewish convoys on the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road were attacked, and by the 9th the Jerusalem riots had spread to Haifa. There were also disturbances of a like nature in the 'mixed quarter' between Tel Aviv and Jaffa. On December 11th a Jewish convoy to the Kfar Etzion group of settlements, south of Jerusalem, was attacked on the Hebron road, and in another attack the following day, on a convoy to the same place, 9 Jews were killed. On the 13th, 14 Jews were killed near Lydda, 5 having been killed near Beersheba the previous day.

The Haganah mobilized, but for the time being remained on the defensive. In contrast, the Jewish dissident organizations, of which there were now two, began to retaliate, outrage for outrage. These two underground forces were the I.Z.L., the Irgun Zvai Leumi (Organization of the National Army), and the Stern Group (Fighters for the Freedom of Israel), so called after their first leader, Abraham Stern.

The outrages continued, and on 4th January 1948 some Jews, dressed as Arabs, drove a lorry containing high explosive into a narrow lane in Jaffa, next to a building occupied by various offices, which they blew up. A number of Arabs were

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killed and wounded. On the following day, in Jerusalem, the Arab-owned Semiramis Hotel, in the Katamon district, was also blown up, with the loss of 20 lives, including that of the Spanish Consul. The Haganah claimed responsibility for this, alleging that the hotel had been the headquarters of Arab terrorists.

The Arabs hit back, and on February 1st they blew up the offices of the Jewish-owned *Palestine Post*. In retaliation, on the 18th of the same month, there was an explosion in Ramleh market place, where 6 Arabs were killed and 32 injured. On the 20th several buildings were demolished by explosives in Ben Yehuda Street, the heart of the Jewish business quarter, the casualties being 50 killed and at least 70 injured. The Jewish Agency issued a statement alleging that members of the British Security Forces were implicated, and as a result some British soldiers, engaged on rescue work, were killed by Jews. This incident further sharpened the tension already felt by British personnel then serving in Palestine.

The Stern Group claimed responsibility for blowing up a modern building in Haifa, on March 1st, in which 14 lives were lost; while on the 11th a wing of the Jewish Agency building in Jerusalem was demolished, and 12 Jews were killed as well as 90 injured. So the sad tale of outrage, explosion and counter-outrage went on throughout the first phase of the war.

The pattern of Arab strategy was to occupy the ground dominating the various main roads, thus getting a stranglehold on communications. They concentrated particularly on the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road and the Jerusalem-Hebron road, with the object of making it difficult or impossible for the Jews to send supplies along them. At this stage the Arab League did not seriously think that they would have to put up a very stiff fight, being under the impression that the whole of Palestine would fall to them pretty well as and when they cared to step in and take it.

The Palestine Arabs had no central plan of campaign for any offensive, but merely sat tight astride the roads hoping that their blockade would starve the Jews out and that one by one

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their settlements would drop into their hands like ripe plums. Almost placidly, they confidently settled themselves down, seeming content that they had got the upper hand, waiting only for the British to evacuate completely so that they could move in to the kill at their leisure. The Palestine Arab Higher Committee, organized and directed at long distance by the Mufti, who took a more realistic view of matters, got to work, and some 275 local national committees were set up in the various Arab towns and villages, whose responsibility was that of local defence. These committees attempted to recruit a sort of Home Guard, which they set about arming and training, but not always with a very high degree of success. The untrained Arab was too individualistic to take kindly to discipline and often in practice each man who had a weapon fired when he thought fit.

From the beginning, the Jews fully realized the importance of the roads, and the fact that whether or not their many scattered and often isolated settlements could hold out depended largely upon their receiving adequate supplies and ammunition. At first the Jewish answer was to try and supply their settlements by convoys of lorries, escorted by armoured vehicles.

The British had been unwilling to allow the Haganah to come out into the open as an armed force, but a step was made when, on 15th December 1947, it was announced that the policing of the Tel Aviv-Petah Tikva district would be turned over to the Jews; while, to keep things even, the Arabs were allowed to police Jaffa. For several weeks after November 29th the official Jewish Settlement and Supernumerary Police, most of whom actually formed the core of the Palmach, which was the striking force of the Haganah, were not allowed to use the armoured cars they had acquired during the Arab Rebellion of 1936-9, with the result that in the early days of the war they suffered heavy casualties whenever their convoys were attacked. But they had large numbers of 'home-made' and improvised armoured vehicles, which they used right from the start.

These convoys, although organized on sound lines, were not

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always successful, and the Jews began to realize that they were not the true counter to the Arab's strategic advantage. Owing to the nature of the country, the convoys were very 'road bound', and were particularly susceptible to ambush. The Jews were also somewhat at a disadvantage as owing to the continued presence of the mandatory power, they suffered a far more restrictive blockade than did the Arabs, who had more opportunity of smuggling arms in from the sympathetic adjacent countries, although the Arabs lacked the organization and money to take advantage of this factor. But of necessity the convoy system was a military policy that they had no option but to pursue during the first three months of the war. Throughout December 1947, January and February 1948, from the Jewish point of view, the story was an unhappy one: of ambushed convoys; the overriding problem of how to supply their isolated settlements so as to enable them to continue to hold out was still to be solved.

By December the governments of the Arab League States, as distinct from the Higher Committee of Palestine, began to take more interest in the internal situation of Palestine and openly approved of armed irregular intervention. The call for volunteers to fight the Jews went out and recruiting centres were set up in Damascus, Beirut, Baghdad and in Egypt.

Syria seems to have been entrusted with the chief responsibility of organizing, training and arming these volunteers, and a barracks in Damascus became the training centre for what came to be called the 'Arab Liberation Army'. A number of Syrian regular officers 'resigned' to train this army, which was put under the command of a swashbuckling Arab soldier-of-fortune, Fawzi Kaukji.

Kaukji had had a varied and interesting career, being an active leader in the field in the latter part of the Arab rebellion against the British in Palestine in 1936-9. He was a Muslim from Lebanese Tripoli, who had served in the Ottoman Army in the First World War, after which he was at one time an intelligence officer to the French in Syria, and at another was military adviser to Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia. In 1941, as an

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officer in the Iraqi Army, he had fought against Britain, after which he escaped to Germany. At the termination of the war, he was for some time a prisoner of the Russians, but was released and like the Mufti, his political master, he was granted sanctuary in France, from whence by devious means he returned to Syria.

By January, large detachments of the Arab Liberation Army began to infiltrate into Palestine. In all, seven of these detachments, with a total estimated strength of perhaps 5,000, had made their way into the country by the beginning of March and they introduced an element of security and hope into the areas in which they settled, temporarily raising the morale of the local Arabs. Many of these volunteers had crossed over the Jordan bridges, in their transport, no positive orders having been given to the Arab Legion, who were guarding these approaches, to halt them. The Trans-Jordan Frontier Force was in process of disbandment.

The Arab Liberation Army when it settled down in Palestine became divided up into four 'commands'. The 'northern command' was looked after by Kaukji himself, who set up his headquarters at Tubas, having the bulk of his men in the Samaritan Triangle, that is the area of Jenin-Tulkharm-Nablus, which was one of the first districts to be evacuated by the British. Of the other parts of his army, the 'eastern command' was centred on Jerusalem, and consisted of at least 1,200 irregulars, under the command of a notable Arab soldier, Abdul Kader, a relation of the Mufti's. His 'western command' consisted of about 800 Iraqis in Jaffa, with a smaller detachment at Ramallah, while the 'southern command' consisted of about 600 men in the Julis area, under the command of Colonel Tarik Bey, a Sudanese. It was Kaukji's irregulars who bore the brunt of the fighting in the first phase of the war, helped, of course, spasmodically by parties of Palestinian Arabs.

Once Britain had made up her mind, her security forces were mainly concerned with a policy of withdrawal. On January 20th the Government announced that predominantly Jewish or Arab areas would be progressively handed over to

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whichever side was in the clear majority, so that the British troops could concentrate at points of strategic importance, such as Jerusalem and Haifa. Already this had been done in the case of Tel Aviv and Jaffa, and other districts followed. The Jewish Agency was told that the Haganah would not be interfered with provided it was used only for defence, and that there would be no more arms searches, except in cases of abuse.

In Palestine were a number of camps, air-fields, supply parks and other installations, a legacy of the recent World War, as well as the forty police fortresses. It was the Government's plan to salvage as much equipment as possible as their troops gradually retired, and they tried to practise a strictly neutral policy of not handing anything over to anyone. To obtain possession of these forts, camps and air-fields, was of great tactical importance to the combatants, more especially in the 'mixed' areas.

The Jews, having the advantage of both a central authority, which issued orders and made plans, and an excellent intelligence service, managed to step in on the tails of the British, as they pulled out, to occupy many of these places. On the other hand, the Arabs were also quick off the mark, jumping in ahead of their rivals whenever they could. The exact timing of the evacuation of these camps and installations was kept secret by the British until the last possible minute. Accordingly, the human element, with its likes and dislikes, played a part, and one side or the other was often tipped off by a sympathizer in the know as to when the vital moment of withdrawal would occur. Generally, the Jews, owing to their superior intelligence service, which had its agents in the various British administrative offices, got the best of this game of snap.

The reaction of the Arabs, and to some extent also of the Jews, to the United Nations' resolution made Britain unwilling to help to put into force its unpopular provisions, or to give any active aid to the Five Power Commission which had been appointed to implement them. Britain declared that she could not be responsible for the safety of its members, and suggested that they should not appear in Palestine until a fortnight before the end of the mandate. Four members did actually arrive on

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February 22nd, but they had little help, and in fact were more, or less confined to the restricted military zone of Jerusalem.

In addition, Britain refused to grant the United Nations' request that a seaport be placed at the disposal of the Jews, on the grounds that the arrival of more reinforcements and arms would further inflame the country. She also objected to allowing the Arab and Jewish Provisional Councils to exercise legal authority, or formally to recognize their local armed forces. The official British attitude was one of neutrality and unco-operativeness towards the United Nations, the Arabs and the Jews alike.

The first armed Arab invasion of Palestine occurred on January 9th, when a force of about 600 irregulars in uniform attacked two Jewish settlements in the north-east of the country. They advanced over the border and essayed a frontal attack, without using much tactical common sense. The defenders managed to hold them off, until British troops, with some armoured cars, arrived to intervene. The invaders then withdrew again. Diplomatic representations were made to try to ensure that there would be no more such invasions, at least while Britain continued to hold the mandate.

In February occurred the first tentative offensive of Kaukji's Arab Liberation Army, which took place in the Beisan Valley. Kaukji, who had crossed into Palestine with a large detachment of his men, on February 12th, was far too restless a character to be content to sit and wait for the ripe plums to drop, as the local Arabs were doing. His men, too, were anxious to be the first to strike at the Jews. So three days after his arrival he moved out against the Jewish settlement of Tirat Zvi, which was about five miles south of Beisan.

Kaukji's intention was to start off with Tirat Zvi, and moving northwards, to roll up the line of Jewish settlements as he came to them, in preparation for a larger-scale movement along the Valley of Esdraelon towards Haifa. He made a frontal attack which took place in heavy rain, the battlefield soon becoming churned to mud. The defenders, who were in well-sited and well dug-in positions, managed to hold the attack off, and



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although Kaukji himself rallied his men two or three times, leading them again and again into the attack, he made no headway. He had overwhelming superiority of men and arms, and had he continued to press the attack, or tried a flanking assault, he would probably have been able to overrun the settlement, but for some unknown reason, as if by unanimous agreement, all the Arabs broke off the action quite suddenly, and withdrew. They left several dead, and much equipment behind on the battlefield. However, unabashed, Kaukji returned to his H.Q. to reorganize and to plan further operations against the Jews.

In this action the Arabs had shown much individual bravery but little tactical skill. They were in superior strength but made poor use of this advantage, appearing to be rather surprised when the defenders hit back at them so hard. Like all irregulars, Kaukji preferred the 'hit and withdraw' type of operation to fighting a prolonged, conventional battle; within an ace of winning, when perhaps another attempt would have swamped the settlement, he broke off the action and retired. Thus ended the first foray of the Arab Liberation Army, of which so much was expected.

This brings us to the end of February, which is roughly the end of the first half of the first phase of the war. In summary, we see the following picture: the war between the Arabs and the Jews has definitely broken out; both sides are frantically smuggling men and war materials; the mandatory power is withdrawing step by step, leaving both sides to scramble for the vacated territory, interfering less and less between them and concentrating its forces in preparation for evacuation.

On the Arab side, we see the influx of the newly-raised volunteer Arab Liberation Army, nourished from Syrian sources, and as a result of the Mufti's efforts, the attempt at organizing and arming village Home Guards. By virtue of their territorial position, they had a firm tactical grip on most of the main roads, which the Jews tried to break by making desperate efforts to supply their outlying settlements by armed convoys. These attempts, owing to their susceptibility to ambush, were

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not always successful. On several occasions they had either to be helped or rescued by British troops, and on others they suffered fairly heavily, their casualties during this period averaging over 300 a month.

Apart from the convoy battles, there was little active fighting during these first three months, the main action being confined to various bomb outrages. Although there had been a few half-hearted local attempts to reduce some of the more isolated Jewish settlements, generally the Palestinian Arab was content to sit down and starve his enemy out. The only two attacks worthy of the name were made by irregulars, the first being the incursion over the northern frontier, which was pressed back by British intervention. The other, in February, was Kaukji's unsuccessful one in the Beisan Valley. The fact that in both these cases the Jewish settlers fought back and managed to keep the enemy at bay caused them to gain confidence and raised their morale. Another activity was the race to seize the various forts and camps as the British left them. So far, the Arabs were generally having the best of it.

### III

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**T**he second half of the first phase was far more lively, and consisted of a number of tactical operations in various parts of the country. It is best to separate each one and to describe it as a whole, rather than to relate events strictly in chronological order, which would mean flitting continually from one part of Palestine to another.

Kaukji's second offensive was made early in April, when he moved out from Nablus with a detachment of his men about 1,000 strong, with half a dozen 75-mm. mountain guns to support him. His immediate objective was the Jewish village of Mishmar Haemek, which meant 'Guardian of the Valley'. As its name indicated, it was a key point against attacks coming from the east along the Valley of Esdraelon. His ultimate intention, after taking this village, was to cut the Tel Aviv-Haifa traffic.

His men surrounded Mishmar on April 4th, entrenching themselves in the hills and villages overlooking and covering it, and on that evening he started a bombardment with his artillery which he kept up throughout the night. For some reason or other the expected dawn attack did not materialize. Had it done so there would have been every chance of its being a success, as at that time the Jewish garrison consisted merely of the settlers themselves, with a small detachment of the Haganah, which had only one Browning M.G., a few small mortars and a limited number of small arms.

The next day a British officer arrived and advised the Jews to evacuate, but although they refused to do so they allowed their children to go. Indeed, their position looked desperate.

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They were a handful of defenders, inadequately armed, surrounded by a thousand or more irregulars.

However, Jewish reinforcements began to arrive on the 6th and over the next two days, and the fighting strength of Mishmar was built up to two Haganah battalions under Brigadier Epstein. This was the first time the Haganah had operated in battle with units of battalion strength. The Arabs made one or two abortive movements forward, but nothing that could be classed as a determined attack, although on the 9th a disjointed offensive was started. This advance was soon broken up by Brigadier Epstein's men. Throughout the whole of this period Kaukji continued to bombard the village with his mountain guns. In all, the struggle lasted for six days, ending on the 10th, when Kaukji suddenly withdrew.

As the Arabs began to retire, the Haganah took the offensive and followed them up, occupying positions in the surrounding hills and villages as the irregulars of the Arab Liberation Army stepped out of them. In this way, the Jews managed to get as far forward as Megiddo, about four miles to the south-east, the 'Armageddon' of history which had seen so many decisive battles. The Haganah kept so close on the heels of the withdrawing Arabs for three or four miles that Kaukji's men had difficulty in breaking off the action, and their morale suffered severely. After this defeat by what he thought to be extremely inferior numbers, Kaukji put out feelers for a truce, which the Jews flatly rejected. In fact the difference in the fighting strengths by April 9th was not quite in the adverse ratio Kaukji imagined, as by that time the Haganah had reinforced the garrison at Mishmar on the one hand, while on the other a proportion of his irregulars had 'disappeared' when they realized that the battle was not going to be a walk-over. But even so, Kaukji had no cause to congratulate himself. His prestige as a successful guerrilla leader began to wane.

Why Kaukji did not develop and press home a determined assault is not altogether clear. Perhaps he had difficulty in co-ordinating and disciplining the various components of his force at this early stage and getting them to work in conjunction

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with each other; and probably it was partly because neither he nor his men took kindly to prolonged, large-scale operations, which required planning, precision and endurance. Again, perhaps they expected an easy or even a bloodless victory, naïvely thinking that their possession of artillery might panic the Jews into speedy evacuation. Lack of courage cannot be considered, as there were several instances of Arab bravery.

Had Kaukji pushed home a dawn attack on the 5th, before Mishmar was reinforced, he would have stood a good chance of overrunning his objective. But he missed the opportunity, and he paid for it doubly as the Haganah followed him up as he retired, taking, and what was more important still, holding on to, the territory the Arabs evacuated.

At this stage of the war the Jews were prevented from using their manpower to the full because of a shortage of arms, but in spite of the British blockade these began to reach them in ever-increasing numbers. The first big cargo was a shipload from Czechoslovakia, which arrived in Palestine at the end of March 1948. Moreover, they did what they could to remedy the shortage by producing 'home-made' weapons in secret workshops. Large numbers of small mortars, called 'Little Davids', as well as ammunition for them, were manufactured, and as time went on members of the Haganah became very proficient in their use.

The necessity for sound military organization, entailing as it did administration, supply and planning, as well as tactical training, was brought home to the Jewish leaders and fully appreciated by them right from the beginning. A start was made in tactical training when a Haganah battle school, on the pattern of a British one, was opened at Nathanyia. At the same time the Haganah itself began to organize, first into battalions, which were seen in action at Mishmar Haemek for the first time, and then into even large formations such as brigades. It was helped by numerous officers who had gained staff experience with the Jewish Brigade and other British formations.

As the British withdrew, anarchy replaced them, especially in the 'mixed' areas, and the breakdown of the administration

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told more heavily on the Jews, whose food and other necessities had to be imported, than it did on the Palestinian Arabs, whose standard of living was much lower. So far, the Jews had been forced to rely on the convoy system to supply their outlying settlements but as more weapons became available they were able to adopt a more positive policy of capturing and picqueting the tactical heights which commanded and controlled the main roads. As they advanced, they drove the Arab inhabitants out of their villages before either occupying them or blowing them up so that they could not be re-occupied by the enemy in order to threaten Jewish communications. The Haganah adopted the practice of giving code names to their operations.

Operation 'Jephtha' was one of these, and it took place in eastern Galilee. It was launched on April 18th and had the dual objects of opening up the Tiberias-Rosh Pina road and taking and clearing the area around Safad.

The town of Safad, which is 2,000 feet above sea level, controlled the roads running from the coast to northern and eastern Galilee, where so many of the more isolated Jewish settlements were, one of the nearest being at Rosh Pina, just over five miles to the east. The Arab centre of Safad was on a hill feature, looking down on the Jewish quarter, 150 feet or so below, which constituted the western, or Jewish, half of the town. The eastern and southern parts were completely Arab. There were two police posts, one where the southern Arab sector met the Jewish quarter, and the other just outside the town, on the road to Mount Canaan, to the north-east. Tactically, the three strongpoints were the two police posts and the centre of the Arab town on the hill-top.

Safad had a population of 2,200 Jews and about 10,000 Arabs. The Arab garrison of the town consisted of a detachment of about 600 Iraqi irregulars of the Arab Liberation Army, supported by between 1,000 and 1,500 Home Guards. Of the Jews, many were Orthodox, which meant that a large proportion were either old, unfit or unwilling to fight, thus cutting down the number of men available for defence to a little over two hundred.

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Trouble began in Safad in December 1947, but until the beginning of April such action as took place in and about the town area was limited to sniping and the usual attacks on Jewish convoys. The Jewish quarter was practically besieged; and as the Arabs commanded the roads leading into the town, supplies had to be brought over rough mountain paths by night. Previously, a party of the Arab Liberation Army, aided by some members of the local Home Guard, had moved out to attack the nearby Jewish settlement of Ein Zeitin, which was four miles to the north-east. The defenders had managed to hold the attackers off until British troops intervened, when the Arabs withdrew. In retaliation, the Haganah had made a raid on the Arab village of Sasa, which was near an important cross-roads about six miles to the north-west of Safad. The Arabs had previously considered Sasa to be well 'behind the lines', and this raid had the effect of putting all villages in Arab territory in a state of tension and suspense. Early in April the Haganah had been able to occupy a dominating hill, which enabled them to put Arab Safad in a state of semi-blockade.

On April 16th the British left Safad, and the two police posts fell into Arab hands, thus giving them all three strongpoints. On the same day some Haganah reinforcements infiltrated into the Jewish quarter of the town to stiffen up the defence. Things then stayed as they were for a short time, as the Jews concentrated on the first part of Operation 'Jephtha', which was the opening up of the Tiberias-Rosh Pina road.

In Tiberias, the population of which was roughly half-Arab and half-Jewish, the Jews had the better tactical position, being higher up on the hillside, overlooking the lower part of the town, which was the Arab sector. Spasmodic fighting had been going on between the two factions for some weeks; truce negotiations conducted by the British were broken off, when a detachment of the Arab Liberation Army came into the Arab sector of the town. On April 18th Tiberias was evacuated by the British, but instead of a fierce battle breaking out for the possession of the town, as was expected, the complete Arab population fled.

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With Tiberias firmly in Jewish hands, the Haganah turned its attention to clearing the road to the north and by April 28th they had successfully accomplished this and in addition had occupied the police post and military camp at Rosh Pina. There remained Safad still to be captured.

In the meantime, farther north still, when the British withdrew from Malikiya, the frontier post near the Lebanese border, the Arabs quickly stepped in and occupied it. On April 20th a detachment of the Haganah tried an attack on the Arab position, but it was unsuccessful. By the end of April the British had completely withdrawn from the whole of eastern Galilee, so no longer handicapped by the curfew on road movement, the Haganah was ready to mount an attack on Safad, reinforcements having arrived in the shape of a Palmach column.

Operation 'Jephtha' continued, and on May 1st the attack commenced and two small Arab villages on the northern outskirts of Safad were taken by the Jews. The next day the Palmach column advanced into Safad itself, but in spite of fierce fighting they could make little headway, the Iraqi irregulars being firmly ensconced in the two police posts and on the hill-top in the town. The whole Arab population fled as soon as the battle started.

On the 6th the Haganah put in an assault on the fortified hill-top but were driven back with some casualties. They withdrew a little way to reorganize, and at dusk on the 9th they tried another attack. This time the Palmach column led the way. House-to-house fighting went on throughout the night until seven o'clock the next morning but this time with more success, the hill-top position being taken as well as the nearest police post. The next day the other police post, on the road to Mount Canaan, was captured after a short, sharp fight. Then, suddenly, all Arab resistance collapsed; by the evening of May 11th all Safad and the immediate surrounding area was in Jewish hands.

So Operation 'Jephtha', one of the first conventional military operations carried out by the Haganah, came to a fairly successful conclusion after a month's fighting. It had taken Safad and



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had opened up the road from Tiberias to Rosh Pina, as it had set out to do, thus firmly establishing the Jews in eastern Galilee. The Iraqi irregulars had fought well; the majority of the local Home Guard decamped early on in the fighting; and in the assaults on Safad the Jews suffered many casualties, chiefly due to inexperience and incorrect use of ground and cover. The battle was by no means an easy one for them, and the Haganah, working as a field army, acquitted itself very well. A notable feature was the fact that the complete Arab population left the district as soon as hostilities began.

In western Galilee all the Jewish road traffic from Tel Aviv to Haifa was compelled to make a detour to avoid Arab villages, at Zichron, a Jewish settlement, about twelve miles south of Haifa, and to cross over the Carmel Range, entering Haifa from the east, by way of Yagur and Kfar Atta. On this diversion was the village of Ramat Yohanan, which commanded a portion of the route just south of Kfar Atta. About three miles to the east was the Arab village of Shafa Amr in the hills, where, at the beginning of April a band of about a hundred Jebel Druse had gathered.

On the 12th the Druse advanced and, driving out the inhabitants, occupied two small Arab villages, from where they were able to shell Ramat Yohanan with some mortars, thus cutting into the Jewish road diversion. At dawn on the 16th the Haganah took the offensive against these Druse, and after some heavy fighting the Jews drove them back, occupying the two villages and two small heights overlooking them. Later in the day the Druse counter-attacked against these two heights, forcing the Haganah to fall back again on the villages.

Having occupied the two heights, the Druse turned the full weight of their assault on the villages, forcing the Haganah out of one of them. After a little time the Jews were on the point of withdrawing from their precarious hold on the other village when the attack fizzled out and the Druse withdrew, leaving the Jews in full possession. The reason why they suddenly broke off their action when they were on the point of being completely successful is not known; perhaps it can be put down to the

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characteristic Arab dislike of prolonged fighting. These two Arab villages continued to remain in the hands of the Haganah, forming a protective outpost on this part of the road deviation from any attack from the direction of Shafa Amr.

Other action in the area just south of Haifa was carried out mainly by a Haganah column moving from Givat Ada, a settlement about two miles east of the Tel Aviv-Haifa road, which succeeded in pressing the Arabs back towards the hills, thus giving a little more 'depth' to the protection of that road. Two or three miles farther south still, during the last fortnight of April and in the early part of May, the Arab irregulars from the hills to the east made repeated attacks on the Jewish settlement of Nabata, but its garrison of settlers, stiffened by a small detachment of the Haganah, succeeded in holding out.

In Haifa itself, an important city and seaport with the best dock facilities in the country, both sides made active preparations for the struggle that was bound to come sooner or later for such a glittering prize. In January the Arabs appointed Mohammed Bek to be their commander and to organize their defence. He had been an officer in the Arab Legion, and was a capable and energetic soldier who soon brought the various irregular bodies that drifted into Haifa under his authority; and at the same time he managed to gain the support of the chief religious and civic personalities. On the Jewish side, Colonel Carmel was appointed to be the commander for the Haifa district and he got on with the task of organizing, arming and training the expanding Haganah units under his command.

Apart from sniping and minor skirmishes between the combatants in or adjacent to the 'mixed' areas, there were three serious incidents before the final battle for the city was fought. The first was after a bomb, thrown by a Jewish terrorist, killed 6 Arabs and injured 47. A riot occurred on December 30th at the Oil Refinery, in which 41 Jewish workers were killed. The second incident happened on March 17th, when an Arab convoy, bringing arms from the Lebanon, was ambushed by the Jews just outside Haifa, and Mohammed Bek, the Arab commander, who was travelling with it, was killed.

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Then followed a period of depression and confusion on the Arab side but, early in April, Amin Azaddin arrived in Haifa with irregular reinforcements, and he was appointed to the vacant command. Reputed to have been an officer in the Arab Legion, and a good organizer, he got things moving again, and Arab morale rose once more. The third incident was when a Jewish convoy, which had taken supplies to a Jewish settlement near the Lebanese frontier, was ambushed and wiped out on its return journey.

Considerable Arab reinforcements, mainly Syrian and Iraqi members of the now disbanded Trans-Jordan Frontier Force, arrived in Haifa during April, and it was an open secret that an offensive was being planned against Hader-Ha-carmel, the main Jewish position on the slope of Mount Carmel above the Arab town. The Jews were not slow to see how things were shaping, and rushed in reinforcements, both to meet the threat and to enable them to carry out their own offensive plans.

The British commander, General Stockwell, seeing that a full-scale battle was about to break out, which, with his reduced forces, he would not be able to control, concentrated his troops in the port area. On April 21st he informed both the Arabs and the Jews of what he had done, and stated that his sole concern was the safe withdrawal of his forces.

This seemed to be a signal for the commencement of hostilities, and on that morning, in an effort to forestall the Arabs, the Jews sent a small detachment of the Haganah to take and occupy Nejidah House. This was a large, concrete building, containing offices, which overlooked and controlled the strategic Rushmiyah Bridge, over which all traffic going eastwards from Haifa must pass. After a desperate fight which went from floor to floor and from room to room, the Haganah managed to get possession of Nejidah House, but once in there they were isolated and unable to move, being pinned down by Arab fire from several directions. The Haganah detachment had several casualties, and attempts were made to relieve them during the day, but all were unsuccessful.

At dusk of that day, the 21st, Colonel Carmel started his

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offensive. It was a four-pronged attack down from Mount Carmel, aimed ultimately at the main strongpoints, which were the telephone exchange, the railway station and the Government Office block. Each column took a different route, and had orders to deal with the various Arab posts as they came to them, the object being to cut off the different Arab sectors from each other, so that eventually they could be contained and taken one by one.

Throughout the night the four Haganah columns fought their way towards their different objectives, with varying degrees of speed and success. The column that had been detailed to go through the Arab quarter met the fiercest resistance, and literally had to force its way forward from house to house. It was in this fighting in Haifa that the Jewish home-made mortars, the 'Little Davids', were used for the first time on a large scale. They contributed much to Jewish successes, and the constant rain of mortar shells took the Arabs by surprise and gave them the impression either that the Jews had suddenly acquired large numbers of artillery pieces or that, worse still, the British garrison had joined in the battle and had turned its guns on them.

The next morning, the 22nd, the fighting everywhere was still going on, and although the Haganah columns were slowly advancing, they were by no means having it all their own way. About eleven o'clock a Jewish mortar shell struck the building in which was situated the Arab H.Q., and at once Amin Aziddin and his staff quietly slipped away out of Haifa, leaving the battle still raging behind them. Until this moment the Arabs had been defending themselves extremely well, and although some ground and buildings had been taken from them, the battle was, by no stretch of the imagination, irretrievably lost. However, as the news of the flight of the Arab commander got around, so did the morale of the Arabs begin to fall and their resistance flagged accordingly.

Meanwhile, the British commander, seeing how the battle was going, got in touch with the leaders of both sides in an effort to arrange a truce. At a meeting in the afternoon Colonel

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Carmel, the Jewish commander, gave his terms for a cease-fire, which were, briefly, that all Arab forces must surrender with their arms, there was to be Jewish control over all Haifa, a curfew would be imposed, and so on. The Arabs asked for a short time to consider these proposals, and left the meeting. They returned to say that they could not accept the Jewish terms, but that instead the complete Arab population, man, woman and child, would abandon Haifa.

General Stockwell pointed out the folly of such a course, but the Arabs were adamant, and the General agreed to arrange a five-day truce to enable this mass evacuation to be carried out, and joint British and Haganah check posts were established to disarm the Arabs before they left. For the first time in many months, Briton and Jew worked together in harmony.

This wholesale, voluntary evacuation of the entire Arab population of Haifa came as a complete surprise to everyone, including the Jews, and has never been satisfactorily explained.

It has been suggested that the Arab negotiators, in their brief absence from the truce meeting, got in touch with their political master, the Mufti, and that he gave them orders to move out, lock, stock and barrel, but that has since been denied. The flight of the Arab population began on the 21st, before the battle proper began, and this was certainly accelerated by psychological warfare, in the form of Haganah loudspeakers and leaflets. But the Jews had never, in their wildest hopes, anticipated such astounding results.

But in New Jerusalem Jewish prospects were not nearly so bright. Engulfed by Arab territory, in the New City of Jerusalem there were about 100,000 Jews; and isolated in the Jewish quarter of the Old City were another 1,700. Of the adjacent settlements there were two, Atarot and Nve Yacov, both just to the north, on the road to Ramallah, and both isolated, while to the south lay the Kfar Etzion group of settlements, also in similar circumstances. Nearer at hand, but also cut off from the New City, was the Mount Scopus position, which included the Hadassah hospital and the Hebrew university.

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All supplies for the New City had to come from the coast, along the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road, which passed through a section of Arab territory, containing the notorious bottle-neck, Bab El Wad, a steep-sided, rocky gorge, ideal for ambushes. In addition, the water supply for Jerusalem came from the wells at Ras El Ein, which was about twelve miles to the east of Tel Aviv, from where it was piped to the city by a series of pumping stations, some of course being in Arab hands. The main Jewish problems therefore centred on food and water. In February a committee was appointed to examine the matter but it took some time to get under way. Eventually, it set about repairing and filling the old rain-water cisterns, of which there were many in the older houses and buildings.

Still the committee's progress was slow and in April Ben Gurion had to grant its chairman dictatorial powers in order to meet the emergency that loomed up in front of them. Then all stocks of foodstuffs and fuel were requisitioned and a system of rationing introduced. Large convoys of supplies from the coast were organized, of which only the first two got through safely, the third being ambushed. During March three of the other convoys had been attacked and many had had to turn back.

In February Colonel Shaltiel, of the Haganah, took over the command of the Jerusalem district. Unlike most of the senior officers of the Haganah, who had no regular military training, Shaltiel was a more conventional type of soldier who had served his apprenticeship in the French Foreign Legion. Political as well as military problems faced him, as there was some confusion and friction within his command over the existence of the independent I.Z.L., and the Stern Group, and the partly independent Palmach, the mobilized striking force of the Haganah, each of which was inclined to go its own way.

On taking over his command and examining his position, Shaltiel's first appreciation was not optimistic, and he quoted a number of military disadvantages, such as the difficulty of supplies, the possibility of a water shortage, the high average age of the inhabitants and their poor physique, as well as there being a large number of Orthodox Jews who refused to fight on

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principle; and of the troops he had under his command, he said that the leadership was poor, their training was sketchy and that they lacked fighting experience. In all, his effective fighting force consisted of about a thousand members of the Haganah, who were actually under his control, not all of whom were armed. Of the others, the I.Z.L. had three armed platoons, while the Stern Group numbered about two hundred armed men. The strength of the Palmach fluctuated considerably, as they came under the general control of the Jewish leaders, and the higher military command; they were moved from one part of the country to another as their services were needed and were not tied down to any one commander or locality. Shaltiel could expect no reinforcements in any number until the end of May, and he had to allow for casualties and losses in the fighting.

As a result of his appreciation, he estimated that he could hold the area of New Jerusalem then occupied, and perhaps even to extend it whenever opportunity favoured him, but he did not consider it possible to continue to supply and support the outlying settlements. Therefore, he recommended that the Jews be withdrawn from the Old City, from Atarot, Nve Yacov and Kfar Etzion, and their garrisons be concentrated under him in the New City. If this was done, he said, he was confident that he could hold on, and as soon as reinforcements arrived he would be able to advance and take the territory as far south as Beit Jala and Bethlehem.

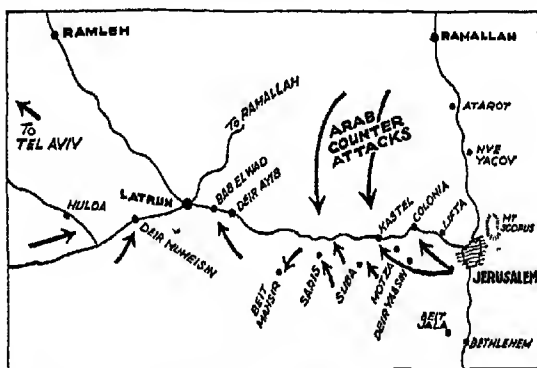
However, political considerations took priority, his recommendations were rejected and he was ordered to continue to hold every inch of ground in Jewish possession, and to advance wherever possible. The Jewish higher command insisted that any evacuation, no matter how necessary, would be bad for morale. Kfar Etzion had already held out for weeks, and there was little reason to doubt that both they, and other settlements, could continue to do so. So Shaltiel had to mobilize his men, set out his defence, and carry on training them as best he could.

The situation from the Arab point of view was correspondingly good; and Abdul Kader Husseini, the commander of the

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Jerusalem region, was an enterprising and courageous leader. It is difficult to estimate with any fine degree of accuracy the exact numbers of troops he had under his command, as many bands of irregulars drifted in and through his district, but there is no reason to doubt that they were not at least equal and even perhaps at times superior in numbers to the Jewish defenders. Unlike the Jews, who expected few reinforcements until late in May, the Arabs anticipated a large increase in strength.

Strategically, the Arab situation was also good, their big advantage being that they had freedom of manoeuvre. They



Battle for the Road. Operation 'Nachshon'. 2nd to 20th April, 1949

had occupied all the heights commanding the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road, from Bab El Wad right up to the outskirts of the New City. Encouraged by their recent successes at ambushing the Jewish convoys, they settled down to wait until the British left the country, confident that they could starve New Jerusalem into submission.

But the changed policy of the Haganah upset this Arab complacency, and on April 2nd Operation 'Nachshon' was launched, the object being to open the road to Tel Aviv by systematically seizing and holding the tactical heights along it. For this operation two Palmach units and two battalions of the field army were raised, a total of just over 1,500 men being



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scraped together. The Palmach members were all veterans by this time, and operated from Jerusalem, but of the field army personnel many were inexperienced and untried in battle and there was a large proportion of raw recruits. The plan was to attack simultaneously from both west and east. Great administrative ability was shown by the many officers concerned who had learnt and practised their staff duties in the British Army, and without whom the operation would never have got under way.

On April 3rd the Palmach made their first attack on Kastel, about five miles west of Jerusalem, which was the key feature dominating that sector of the road. The Palmach battalion wormed its way forward during the night, making the assault, which was successful, just before dawn. For a short space of time it managed to hold on to the position, but a determined counter-attack, led by Abdul Kader, drove it off again.

To the west, the other part of Operation 'Nachshon' was launched, and a unit of the field army advanced and took both Hulda and Deir Muheisin, two Arab villages about a mile from Latrun, the occupation of which they completed by the 6th. However, they were ordered out by the British forces, who wanted the roads free for their own use. This Hanagah unit stayed in the vicinity, but sent what reinforcements it could spare to the east where the main struggle was raging fiercely around Kastel.

On the early morning of the 6th a Jewish convoy of supply vehicles, loaded with provisions, slipped through during a lull in the battle. Time and time again the Palmach assaulted Kastel, taking it again on the 8th, only to be driven off after a few hours. On the 9th they made another assault, while other available units were dispersed around to block enemy reinforcements and so prevent their being rushed to the battle area. This time the Palmach were successful, but immediately the Arab irregulars, again led by Abdul Kader in person, put in a desperate counter-attack. After several hours of confused fighting, in which Abdul Kader was killed, the Arabs were driven off, and this time Kastel remained in Jewish hands.

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Colonia was taken on the 11th, by a night attack, and then Lifta fell to the Haganah. On that night, Beit Mahsir was occupied as well as the surrounding high ground. Bab El Wad was the next to be taken, and on the 13th a second convoy, this time consisting of 175 vehicles from Tel Aviv, was rushed through. Saris was successfully attacked on April 16th, the village being demolished, but repeated assaults on Suba failed, and Operation 'Nachshon' was brought to a halt.

However, the highlight of the fortnight's battle was when a convoy of 250 vehicles managed to get through. But on the 17th the Arabs started their counter-offensive to retake their lost territory, which they directed at Bab El Wad, which was in reality the 'gateway' to the gorge leading up to Jerusalem, and through which the road passed. When the Jews tried to push a convoy of 294 vehicles through on the 20th it was heavily attacked at Deir Ayib, and badly knocked about. Many of the vehicles raced through the ambush, which was not completed, but the road from the sea was again blocked after this.

Operation 'Nachshon' had not been a complete success, for although the road had actually been opened for a couple of days the Jews had not taken full advantage of the fact to hurry all the waiting convoys and supplies through, and it was soon blocked again by the Arab counter-offensive. Kastel was the key position around which most of the fighting took place, and the Arabs fought extremely well and bravely under Abdul Kader, who was a clever guerrilla tactician. It was only after his death that the Palmach was able to remain in occupation. After this event, even though other strategic heights and villages were taken in turn, the operation slowly ground down to a standstill. From the start it had been a gamble, but the urgent need of supplies in New Jerusalem forced the Jews to take the risk. It was, however, a partial success, and it gave the Haganah officers vital experience in organizing and maintaining large numbers of troops in the field under active service conditions.

It was during Operation 'Nachshon' that the notorious massacre of Deir Yassin, by the I.Z.L. and the Stern Group,

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occurred to shock the world. These two dissident organizations were completely independent of the Haganah command, and they only fell in with Colonel Shaltiel's wishes when it suited them. On April 9th, it will be remembered, the Palmach were putting in their assault on Kastel, and all the other units available were tactically dispersed on routes along which Arab reinforcements might be rushed. The I.Z.L. and the Stern Group agreed to look after Deir Yassin.

In the initial taking of the village they ran into some trouble, and as they suffered some casualties they had to ask the Haganah to help them complete the taking of Deir Yassin which they had not been able to do alone. With Haganah help the village was occupied. This gave rise to the suspicion that the Haganah were implicated in the subsequent massacre, but there is no basis of fact in this allegation; the Haganah withdrew from the village as soon as they could, as they were urgently needed elsewhere, leaving the two dissident organizations to hold it. All then was in order.

The atrocities happened after the Haganah had withdrawn, and were perpetrated by members of the I.Z.L. and the Stern Group alone. Of the inhabitants of the village, 254 were slaughtered, men, women and children, and their bodies thrown down a well. The I.Z.L. called a secret Press conference to announce the fact and stated that it was the beginning of the conquest of Palestine and Trans-Jordan. It was only later that they hinted that the Haganah also played a part, and that they were merely acting on official instructions, as the space was required for an air-strip. The Jewish Agency strenuously denied all knowledge and responsibility, and sent a message of sympathy to King Abdullah of Trans-Jordan. At the time it was roundly condemned, but later the Jews did not scorn to make capital of it.

Within sight of New Jerusalem, to the north-east, the Jews continued to hold their positions on Mount Scopus, which consisted primarily of the university and the hospital, although it was closely invested on all sides by Arab irregulars. The road to it passed through the Arab village of Sheikh Jarra, where,

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on April 13th, in retaliation for the Deir Yassin massacre, the Arabs ambushed a Jewish convoy, killing 77 people before British troops were able to intervene. The Jews immediately protested that the convoy was a humane and harmless one, containing only essential supplies for the hospital, but neutral investigation showed that although many of the vehicles in the convoy had Red Cross insignia on them, they were escorted by vehicles containing armed Jews, and that some of the lorries had war-like stores on board.

When Operation 'Nachshon' came to a halt, Colonel Shaltiel turned his attention to Sheikh Jarra, barring as it did his way to Mount Scopus. This village was taken by the Palmach, in the early hours of April 25th, after two hours' fighting, and the Arab irregulars holding it were driven out. But Sheikh Jarra lay on one of the British evacuation routes, and the British ordered the Jews from the positions they had just gained. The Jews protested strongly and were extremely reluctant to quit, but after the British fired a few warning shots the Haganah withdrew quietly. When they left the Arab irregulars percolated back again. On April 29th Colonel Shaltiel made another attempt to try and neutralize this danger spot, this time from another direction, but he was unsuccessful and the Arabs remained in possession.

Inside the Old City, in the Jewish quarter, things were not going too well. Emile Ghoury, a Christian Arab, had assumed command of the Jerusalem region after Abdul Kader's death, and in retaliation for some bomb outrages committed by the Jewish dissident organizations, the Arabs had blockaded the Jews in the Old City. A very high percentage of these Jews were Orthodox, having little interest in the political struggle that was taking place. For centuries, their families had been living in abject humility, grateful for being permitted to live in their Holy City, and they contrasted sharply with the virile Jews of the settlements. Food convoys were escorted in by British troops, but these got fewer and fewer and the supply situation became very critical. The British authorities constantly urged them to evacuate, but as has been seen, the Jewish political

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leaders ordered them to hold out, primarily for prestige reasons.

During the last few weeks of the mandate the High Commissioner, with the International Red Cross, concentrated on trying to bring about a cease-fire in Jerusalem, where the friction was the worst. On April 18th he had proposed a local cease-fire, to which the Jewish Agency had agreed, but the Arabs refused to have anything to do with it. Eventually, on April 28th, an agreement was reached for a local cease-fire, but in the Old City only, which was due to come into effect on May 2nd.

But in the early hours of the morning of April 30th the Haganah launched an attack on Katamon, a long, narrow ridge which was the main strategic height in south Jerusalem. Previously, it had been a mixed European and Arab district but, deserted by its inhabitants, it had been occupied by a detachment of Iraqi irregulars who were firing into the various Jewish suburbs it commanded.

Palmach reinforcements were called in for this assault which went in covered by a heavy screen of mortar fire. There was some fierce fighting but a toe-hold was gained after two hours' battling, from which the Jews managed to make good the occupation of the St. Simeon monastery, a prominent building, to which they held on. At dawn the Iraqis counter-attacked in force from the south, coming from the direction of Beit Safafa on the railway line, but the Palmach commander, anticipating this move, let it get under way and then launched his 'counter-counter-attack', which took the advancing Iraqis in their flank, completely surprising them. The Arabs broke and fled, and the Palmach remained in possession of what they had taken, and during the next two days fought their way steadily forward, until by the evening of May 2nd the whole of the Katamon ridge was in their hands.

In complying with the cease-fire on May 2nd, the Jews held on to all their recent gains, in retaliation for which the Arabs interfered with the Jerusalem water supply, puncturing the pipes, and for a few days no water came through. So the cease-fire was never really in operation at all. But the High Commis-

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sioner persevered, and by the 8th, when their position had deteriorated somewhat, the Arabs at last agreed. From May 8th to the 14th the British were able to maintain a precarious sort of peace, but only by opening fire with their tanks and artillery on both sides whenever there were signs of fighting breaking out again. On the 12th the High Commissioner put forward new proposals for a truce, which were, roughly, that in return for allowing free access for essential supplies into the Jewish quarter of the Old City, the Jews should evacuate Katamon. This time there was no reply from the Jews.

On the coast are the twin cities Jaffa and Tel Aviv, connected by a narrow bottle-neck, a rabbit-warren of an Arab slum, which became a no-man's-land. On April 25th, without consultation with the Haganah, the I.Z.L. launched an attack on Jaffa. For it they had mustered about 600 members, who were well supplied with small arms, having in addition some 3-inch mortars and an ample supply of ammunition.

At the beginning the attack went fairly well; the I.Z.L. members fought determinedly and made small advances, but as the battle developed their limitations as a field force became apparent. The house-to-house fighting was their strong suit, and they soon proved that they could take buildings, but holding them in a set pattern was another matter. Once the surprise was lost, the I.Z.L. force broke up into small detachments and groups, each engrossed in fighting its own little battle, and there was a general lack of cohesion and control over the whole operation. The Iraqi irregulars, who were defending Jaffa, fought well, and after a day and a night forced the I.Z.L. to a halt.

Once the momentum of the attack was lost, and having no reserves to call on, the I.Z.L. commander, when he saw there was a distinct possibility of his being beaten back, called on the Haganah to help him against the Arabs. But some differences seem to have arisen, the two bodies being independent and having no formal liaison between each other, and there was a time lag before the attack was renewed. On April 29th the Jews assaulted again, this time the Haganah taking one sector

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and the I.Z.L. the other, and their combined weight soon began to push the Arab defenders back. By this time the civilian population of Jaffa had started to evacuate. The British intervened and forced a cease-fire on both sides, under the threat of direct air intervention but even so Jewish pressure was kept up, and on May 13th Jaffa surrendered to them. By this time the complete Arab population had fled.

It was here, in this battle for Jaffa, in the deserted Arab houses, that for the first time Jewish troops began to loot, a practice which the Arab irregulars had long indulged in. Looting, one of the diseases of war, is a catching one, and by May 6th and 7th it had spread to the Katamon district of Jerusalem, despite frantic efforts of the responsible Jewish commanders to control it.

In the countryside around Jaffa and Tel Aviv the Jews had also been expanding their territory, and on May 1st the Haganah had taken the Arab villages of Salamah and Yazur. The nearby Lydda airport was a tempting prize. It was evacuated by the British on April 25th, and at once both Arabs and Jews fought for its possession; the Arabs got the upper hand in the initial stages but later the Haganah ejected them and took over the airport. But on April 27th the British troops moved in again and the Jews had to leave. When the British finally pulled out from the airport the Iraqi irregulars jumped in and grabbed it.

In Jerusalem the battle for the 'road' was still going on. Operation 'Maccabi' had succeeded Operation 'Nachshon', in the attempt to open it up for traffic from the coast, and between May 8th and 11th seven tactical heights were recaptured by the Haganah. The last one to be taken was that of Beit Mahsir, which only fell after a nine-hour battle, after which the Jews were able to fight off several strong Arab counter-attacks. All the positions taken then remained in Haganah hands.

To the south, the several isolated settlements in the Negev gave some cause for anxiety. These settlements were both of strategic and experimental value, being strung out over a wide

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area, and many of them had to be supplied with piped water. The Arab inhabitants of the Negev were semi-nomadic Bedouins, who after November 1947 commenced raiding the settlements, ambushing the convoys and damaging the water-pipes. By March the Jewish high command started to put a defence scheme into operation, and moved in more soldiers and workers, as well as forming a small mobile striking force to protect the area. The settlements were fortified as far as was possible, but the scheme was never fully completed owing to lack of manpower, vehicles and weapons.

An unusual feature of this war, which had become more than apparent, was the complete and voluntary evacuation of the Arabs from their towns and villages as the Jews advanced. In Haifa, Jaffa, Tiberias, Safad and numerous other smaller places this had occurred. It was of immense benefit to the Jews. Arab higher committee plans for a resistance campaign had been based on the supposition that the civil population would stay put, so that the 'irregulars' and 'terrorists', who would operate underground against the Jews, would be able to 'merge' into the background, hiding their weapons and becoming respectable citizens again whenever they became hard pressed, as both sides had done under the British mandate. This mass refugee movement shattered all Arab hopes of such an underground resistance campaign.

There were several reasons for this mass exodus, perhaps the first being due to the Arab leaders themselves who early in the war had ordered Arabs living on the edges of the 'mixed' areas to evacuate their villages so as to leave the field clear for the Arab Liberation Army to conduct military operations. They convinced the Arabs that their removal would only be for a short time, and that they would be able to return to their homes on the heels of Kaukji's victorious men, when loot and plunder from the Jews would more than compensate for any discomfort they might have to experience.

Another reason was that as the Jews advanced and took Arab villages, they expelled the inhabitants, and blew up the place if they did not want to occupy it themselves so that it



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could not be re-occupied by their enemies and used against the Jewish lines of communication. Another cause was that the Arab Liberation Army used Arab villages for their operational bases, which led to Jewish reprisals against them and their inhabitants. The actions of the Jewish terrorist organizations caused much panic and alarm; and the Deir Yassin massacre, when it came, turned the steady Arab flight into a flood.

It was the Jewish policy to encourage the Arabs to quit their homes, and they used psychological warfare extensively in urging them to do so. Later, as the war wore on, they ejected those Arabs who clung to their villages. This policy, which had such amazing success, had two distinct advantages. First, it gave the Arab countries a vast refugee problem to cope with, which their elementary economy and administrative machinery were in no way capable of attacking, and secondly, it ensured that the Jews had no fifth column in their midst.

On the other hand, there was hardly any movement of the Jewish population. The Jewish Agency had clamped down hard on the people and kept a close grip, refusing exit permits, without which a Jew could not leave the country. Generally, their inclination was wholeheartedly to hang on to where they were with tooth and claw. The only discernible movement was a limited exodus from New Jerusalem to the coastal plain.

The last action to be related in this chapter is that of the fall of the Kfar Etzion group of settlements. They were taken by soldiers of the Arab Legion, just before the mandate officially drew to its close, a fact which caused the Jews to accuse Britain of formally sanctioning, and even of openly abetting the attack. This was not so by any means.

As the end of the mandate approached, all units of the Arab Legion, which were on garrison duty in Palestine, were ordered to return to Trans-Jordan. It is the Jewish charge that several of these units neglected to obey this order and were in action against them before May 14th. But apart from the incident of Kfar Etzion, there is little evidence to substantiate this allegation. There may have been individuals but such scattered elements as were in Palestine immediately prior to May 14th

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were actually in transit back to their own country. There is little doubt where their sympathies lay, but apart from the one incident, their behaviour appears to have been correct; the brunt of such fighting as was done before the British left the country was borne by Kaukji's Arab Liberation Army, aided by the local Home Guards. Jewish opinion at that stage was quick to include 'ex-Legionnaires', of whom there were many, with the regular, serving soldiers of the Arab Legion itself. Glubb Pasha through the years had been ruthless in weeding out and discharging those Arabs who did not come up to his own high standards, and a large number of them had gravitated towards troubled Palestine.

The Kfar Etzion group consisted of four Jewish settlements, which lay about fourteen miles south of Jerusalem, just off the Hebron road. They had been in a state of siege for several weeks, and had to be supplied by convoy. They were garrisoned by about 400 members of the Haganah, and although they were invested, and on short rations, they had already repelled a number of attacks from the Arab irregulars and locals, and the Jewish political leaders considered that Colonel Shaltiel's anxiety for their security was unfounded. Although there was difficulty in getting supplies to them, and a small detachment of Haganah reinforcements which had tried to filter in was completely wiped out, it was thought that they should be at least able to hold out for the time being.

Before the end of March, convoys had managed to get through to these settlements fairly regularly, but on the 27th of that month a convoy from Jerusalem, which had taken supplies there, was ambushed on its return journey. Several vehicles were knocked out immediately. The Jews fired back at the enemy and managed to take refuge, with their remaining vehicles which were able to move (they had a large number of their 'home-made' armoured cars defending this convoy), in Nebi Daniel, a deserted Arab village, where they managed to hold the attacking Arabs at bay. During this battle four small Haganah 'Auster type' aircraft appeared and dropped bombs on the Arabs, but to little effect.

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The next day, the 28th, the Christian Arab Mayor of Bethlehem intervened, and negotiated a cease-fire, and British troops escorted the Jewish survivors back to Jerusalem. Their total casualties were over forty killed, and it was a particularly disastrous action for the Jews, as nearly all their 'armoured cars' available in the Jerusalem district, which had been concentrated to protect this convoy, were lost.

After that, vital supplies were sometimes smuggled through and sometimes dropped on the settlements by the Jewish light aircraft. The Arab irregulars surrounding them continued to press closely, but did not essay any more large-scale attempts to overrun the Jewish positions. The Jews were still aggressive and were of considerable nuisance value to Arab vehicles moving along the Hebron road.

That was the position when, on May 13th, two returning companies of the Arab Legion found the provocation too much for them and deployed to put in the attack which took the settlements. The Arab Legion had some armoured cars and some 3-inch mortars and, assaulting on the conventional principle of holding fire and flanking attacks, they took the Jewish positions, one by one, the Haganah survivors being taken prisoner. The conduct of the Legionnaires was very good, and they protected their prisoners from the irregulars and local Arabs who would have massacred them.

On May 14th the British left Jerusalem and another phase of the war began.

To summarize this second half of the first phase, the 'jockeying for position' before the main battle was joined, it can be said that generally the Jews came out on top. During the last three months, the mandatory power had been rapidly concentrating its forces, interfering hardly at all between the combatants, being concerned only with keeping its own withdrawal routes clear.

The Jews had launched several conventional operations, each neatly labelled with an appropriate code name; the expanding Haganah gained battle experience as a field army, and their morale, already high, rose even higher. They had got the

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measure of the Arab irregular and it gave them confidence in themselves as soldiers. Their successes included Haifa, Jaffa and eastern Galilee. Kaukji had been beaten back at Mishmar Haemek, and their attempt to open the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road was partially successful as some much-needed supplies got through. On the other hand, the New City, the two small settlements to the north, Mount Scopus and the Old City, as well as many other settlements up and down the country, were invested by the Arabs, and Kfar Etzion had fallen.

Generally the Arabs had come off second best and at the end of this round their morale was decidedly low. Kaukji's Arab Liberation Army had not lived up to expectations and had conquered no new territory from the Jews. Their attacks had been beaten off. In the Jerusalem sector, in the 'Battle for the Road', the irregulars had fought extremely well under Abdul Kader, but his personality and drive had much to do with it, and after his death they did not seem to have quite the same aggressive spirit, although their counter-offensive did manage to close the road again two days after the Jews had forced it open.

The abrupt loss of Haifa was a big blow to the Arab cause and to their prestige. True, a lucky shell had helped to turn the tide, causing the Arab commander hurriedly to quit his post. In most of the various actions, although there was no sign that they were getting the worst of it, after some fighting the Arabs suddenly packed up and withdrew, thus ceding the advantage and the battle to the Jews. The solitary success, that of Kfar Etzion, was a victory for the Arab Legion, rather than to the horde of irregulars and local Arabs who had been vainly hammering away at the settlements for weeks without any good result. As regards the refugee problem, the mistaken policy of asking the Arab inhabitants to withdraw temporarily from the fighting zone had got beyond their leaders' control, and when the massacre of Deir Yassin was committed, there was no stopping the movement which had become an uncontrollable spate.

## IV

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With the withdrawal of the British forces on 14th May 1948, the way was left clear for the next phase of the war, which was the invasion of the regular forces of the various states of the Arab League. Before going on it is as well to pause to consider these newcomers to the fray, their background and their resources; and briefly, too, to review the 'Israeli' forces, as they must now be called.

With the birth of Israel, the Haganah, the Jewish Defence Organization, which had been under the control of the Jewish Agency during the mandate, came out into the open and was at once regarded as the official army of the new Jewish state. Already, on May 2nd, general mobilization for all Jews in Palestine had been decreed, calling up all men under forty years of age into one or another of the various branches of the Haganah, or to carry out jobs of national importance. Gradually the Haganah had been coming out into the open for some time before the British left, and on April 27th they had even held a 'public' parade, in New Jerusalem, where the Jewish commander had taken the salute.

The origins of the Haganah went back to the days of Turkish rule, when 'Shomerin' (Guards) were appointed to afford a sort of 'police protection' to the various Jewish villages and settlements, against raiding Bedouins. After the Russian pogroms of 1905, these guards were reinforced by many Jews from that country who had received some form of military training, and in 1907 these 'Guards' were expanded into an organization called the 'Hasomer' (Watchmen), the members of which were

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pioneers and whose duty it was to defend Jewish settlements in the most exposed and dangerous areas. Many of the Hasomer joined the British forces in the First World War.

After the Balfour Declaration, the Hasomer was transformed into a wider organization, open to all able-bodied Jews in Palestine, and this developed into the 'Haganah' (Defence Organization), which had a small full-time staff. Generally, it retained its 'police flavour' and many of the Zionist leaders were opposed to its developing into a 'military' formation. The British administration frowned on an armed organization in the country under their control, but the disturbances and riots of 1921 made it clear to the authorities that there were limitations to what protection could be afforded to outlying settlements by a slow-moving, centralized military force. The result was that the Haganah, officially known as the Jewish Settlement, or supernumerary police, was in the more distant and isolated places allowed to have a few weapons which had to be kept in a 'sealed box', only to be opened and used in cases of emergency.

In the widespread riots of the year 1929 the Jews suffered heavily and many were murdered by the Arabs, but where they had weapons, they mostly managed to hold off the Arab attacks. After this, the British Government policy was somewhat modified, although it would not grant formal recognition, so the Haganah still had to carry on as an 'underground' force. As if to make up for this, an increase was allowed in the establishment of the Jewish settlement police, who were, of course, its backbone. Secretly, the Haganah expanded, arms were illicitly acquired and clandestine training was carried out, so that when the Arab rebellion broke out, in and about 1936, it was able to give a good account of itself. Successful offensive tactics against the Mufti's rebels were introduced by Wingate, who did much to reorganize and raise the morale and efficiency of the Haganah. During those troubled years of 1936-9, many Jewish settlements were attacked by Arabs, but all managed to hold out, and none had to be evacuated.

During the Second World War large numbers of the Hag-

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Haganah served with the British forces, as Jews everywhere joined in the war effort against the Germans. A party of the Haganah, under Moshe Dayan (now the Chief of Staff of the Israel Army), entered Syria in advance of the Allied forces, to gather information for the British. In 1941, when a German invasion of Palestine was more than a mere possibility, it was planned, in the event of evacuation having to take place, to leave behind units of the Haganah to act as a 'fifth column'. A special mission was set up to train the Jews for this purpose, and a school of instruction was opened at Mishmar Haemek, where picked members of the Haganah received training. These members became the nucleus of the Palmach, its 'Commando arm'.

After Alamein, when the tide of war turned in favour of the British, the Government in Palestine again began to frown on the Haganah, but in spite of official disapproval it remained in existence as an 'underground' military organization, under the control of the Jewish Agency. After the war it was chiefly engaged in smuggling immigrants into the country from Europe. As soon as hostilities had ceased it began to expand into an army proper, and many of the officers, N.C.O's and men who had served with the Jewish Brigade and other British units, were quickly absorbed into it.

Its head for a time was Moshe Sneh, who had landed from Poland in 1940. He soon achieved a prominent position in the Zionist organization and had been co-opted to the Jewish Agency executive as a specialist in security matters, and as such had been responsible for the Haganah. However, he resigned in July 1946, owing to differences of opinion with Dr. Weizmann, the President of the Jewish Agency, and his place was taken by Israel Galili, who was opposed to terrorist tactics and retaliatory measures.

As regards the strength of the Haganah at the end of the mandate it is hard to estimate with any great degree of accuracy as widely varying figures have been quoted, but it is generally believed to have been at least 60,000 strong. Included in this number were over 300 British-trained officers, who had learnt the art and administration of war in the Jewish Brigade, as

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well as many who had been officers in the Royal Navy, the R.A.F. and forces of other countries, such as America and France. In addition, there were those who had served in the ranks in the various armies, possibly as many as 20,000 all told. True, the male Jewish population was then about 200,000, which makes the figure just quoted for the overall total of the Haganah look rather small in view of the mobilization orders that had been put out by the Jewish authorities, but there were a large number of 'Orthodox', who had little interest in the political struggle, and the call-up was in practice a very gradual process.

The Haganah consisted basically of four elements: the Palmach, the field army, the Home Guard and the youth battalions. The Palmach was the mobilized 'standing army', a *corps d'élite*, with a strength of about 3,000, or possibly a little more; and it included a small percentage of women. The word 'Palmach' comes from the Hebrew 'Plugoth Ha-Mahatz', meaning 'Spearhead Detachment'. It had been founded in May 1941 by Yizhack Sadeh, who had formerly been an officer in the Russian Army in 1917, after which he had led an adventurous life, being, amongst other things, a professional wrestler and a journalist.

The Palmach consisted of four battalions, with a fifth in reserve, and was well trained in guerrilla warfare and Commando tactics, being composed of the better educated volunteers, who were the pick of the towns and settlements. Political training was insisted on, and its officers were something in the nature of commissars as well as military leaders. The Jewish settlement police formed a large percentage of its members.

It was a self-contained entity, having its own headquarters, organization and administration. Its chief of staff was the 30-year-old Ygal Alon, who became its commander when Sadeh left. It was, in effect, a small private army. In its earlier stages, and just after the end of the Second World War, members of the Palmach had to work for half a month and then train for the other half, as insufficient funds were available to support a fully-mobilized standing army, no matter how small. But as the



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situation deteriorated it gradually became necessary for them to be fully mobilized all the time, for they were the only trained troops capable of a sustained offensive against the Arabs.

Next in importance came the field army, which was formed and organized on a regional basis and consisted of young people who had already had some training of one sort or another, and who managed to get away from their work for a few days every so often to do a little more. Numbers again are unreliable, but it is perhaps fairly safe to say that this field army was between 6,000 and 10,000 strong. It was the first line of defence (counting the Palmach as being their offensive), and its personnel stood ready to be called up in any emergency, but its units were tied down to their own particular regions and districts.

After the field army, and in support of it, was the Home Guard (Mishmar Ha'am), the second line of defence which (eventually) included almost every other fit person available, including women; its task was to defend the villages, factories and farms the members lived or worked in. Like the field army, it was confined to its own region, but the Home Guard was static while the field army was mobile to some degree. In April 1948 an order had gone out calling on all males up to the age of 55 to become members of the Home Guard unless they were in some other formation. Only a small percentage were armed and the members were in varying degrees of efficiency, some having had no military instruction before.

Lastly, there were the youth battalions for young volunteers of about 17 years of age. There were several of these, and as time went on they became more of a cadre or cadet type of unit, although in the early days of the war some of these units had to go into action against the Arabs. Like the Palmach, these youth battalions were not tied down to any district and could be moved to wherever they were required.

The Haganah had a small air section, as well as a tiny naval section.

The system of control and command was rather complicated, having grown up and been adopted according to circumstance, political dictates and local conditions. Until the end of the

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mandate defence matters were dealt with by a small committee, headed by Ben Gurion of the Jewish Agency. This committee was composed of the leaders of the various political parties, except the extremists, and laid down the general policy that the Haganah was to follow. Below this level was another committee consisting of both soldiers and civilians, which carried that policy out. The military head of the Haganah was still Israel Galili, whose political influence with the Palmach was very great, and his chief of staff was Zvi Aylon. There were the usual staff departments on conventional army lines, such as the general branch, operations planning section, a quartermasters' department, a training department, as well as branches of supply, man-power, intelligence and education.

For the purpose of defence the whole country was divided into areas, each being under a brigade commander, who was responsible for the forces in his area and for its security and defence. These brigadiers were tied down to their own regions and came directly under the chief of staff for orders.

Arms were very scarce on the Israeli side in May 1948, being practically limited to small arms alone. A semi-official source quoted that they had at least 10,000 rifles, 450 L.M.G's, 180 M.M.G's, 96 3-inch mortars, 670 2-inch mortars, and a fair supply of Stens and pistols. These figures have never been seriously questioned so they may be accepted as a conservative minimum. Only one shipload of arms had arrived before May 14th, which had brought in 4,500 rifles and 200 L.M.G's, but smuggling of arms and ammunition had been going on for a considerable time.

Their only field artillery was two 65-mm. guns, for which they had only a limited supply of ammunition. Artillery pieces were on order in the various countries, and were, in many instances, actually in transit, but they had not arrived by May 14th. The first to come was a batch of 20 anti-aircraft guns, and this signalled the start of a steady flow of military supplies. Generally, their shortage of ammunition, as well as of weapons, was a serious problem, which they had tried to overcome by manufacturing it for themselves. They also got on with the

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making of small mortars, the 'Little Davids'. In addition they produced quantities of home-made bombs of different sorts, including 'Molotov Cocktails'.

Large numbers of armoured cars were improvised, and at one time they had as many as 800, but owing to the strong Arab hold on the roads the Jewish vehicle losses were heavy. So perhaps an overall figure of between 400 and 500 may have been more accurate. These were a very 'mixed bag', and by no means all of them were a hundred-per-cent bullet-proof. They had about half a dozen British light armoured vehicles of different types, which had either been brought over to them by deserters, or acquired by other means, as well as two Cromwell tanks which they had obtained by bribery of British personnel. Shortly after, two Sherman tanks were added to this collection.

The air section of the Haganah had bought 21 second-hand, war-soiled, light Auster aircraft from the British, but they only managed to get about 8 of them airborne at any one time. Based on the settlement of Rafikim, in the Esdracdon Valley, they were used to very good effect, supplies being dropped on isolated settlements such as Kfar Etzion and those in the Negev, shells and supplies rushed to Jerusalem, and Arab positions pelted with home-made 50-kilo bombs. This use of aircraft by the Jews had a demoralizing effect on the Arabs, who until the end of the mandate had none of their own. The Israelis had purchased fighter and bomber aircraft but they were all still in transit.

The general deduction from this picture is that of the probable organized fighting strength of the Israelis, say about 60,000 plus, only about a quarter or less were armed; and that they had in effect no heavy supporting arms. Although mobilization notices had gone out to practically the whole male population, lack of weapons caused the Israelis to practise a 'graduated call-up' as and when arms became available.

In addition to the Haganah, there were the two dissident organizations, the Irgun Zvai Leumi and the Stern Group, which came into the open when the British left the country, and declared that they would fight side by side with the

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Haganah against the Arabs while stoutly maintaining their own independence.

The Irgun Zvai Leumi, the 'National Military Organization', whose emblem was a raised hand grasping a rifle with a fixed bayonet and the motto 'Only Thus', was the militant branch of the 'Revisionists', an extreme political party whose programme, amongst other things, included the establishment of a Jewish state on both sides of the River Jordan. Most of its leaders were recent arrivals from eastern Europe who had come to look on force as the supreme argument.

The I.Z.L. had come into being in 1937, when it was founded by David Raziel and Abraham Stern as a protest against the Haganah policy of 'Havlagah' (self-restraint), which gave the Arab terrorists all the initiative. Raziel joined the British forces during the Second World War and was killed during operations in Iraq, and by 1948 it was commanded by Menachin Begin, a former Warsaw lawyer and Revisionist leader who had arrived in Palestine with General Anders' Polish Army.

The I.Z.L. had between 600 and 800 armed members, trained in terrorist methods, who were accustomed to operate in small parties and to 'merge' into the civilian background when hard pressed. It had no 'army organization' as such, and little knowledge of tactics or manoeuvre, which severely limited its ability as an effective field force. This was demonstrated clearly in the battle for Jaffa. In addition to these armed men there may have been up to 3,000 active helpers, sympathizers and fellow-travellers. They mainly operated in Jerusalem, where they had gained some popularity by repudiating that part of the United Nations' resolution which declared that Jerusalem was to be a *corpus separatum*, and in Tel Aviv.

Relations between the I.Z.L. and the Jewish Agency had varied. At times there had been some measure of co-operation between the two, but whenever the Agency had tried to discipline the I.Z.L., there had been friction and disagreement. During the British mandate the I.Z.L., being 'underground' had been able to raid as and when it pleased, dramatically and

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romantically, without having to face any of the consequences or of having to make any explanations; while the Jewish Agency, which had remained in the open and which was, of a necessity, more sensitive to world opinion, especially that in America, was left to smooth things over. This irresponsibility on the part of the I.Z.L. did not endear it to the Haganah. After coming into the open on the termination of the mandate, the members still remained under their former leaders, and the organization continued to seek its own separate financial support.

The other Jewish underground terrorist organization was the 'Fighters for the Freedom of Israel', more popularly known as the 'Stern Group' or the 'Stern Gang'. This had broken away from the I.Z.L. in 1941, under the leadership of Abraham Stern, who disagreed with the I.Z.L. policy of suspending operations against the British during the war years. By 1948 it was led by Nathan Friedmann-Yellin, a Polish Jew, and consisted of between 200 and 300 armed fanatics, trained in acts of terrorism, with perhaps up to 2,000 or more active supporters and fellow-travellers.

The Stern Group was mainly activated by a deep hatred for the British, their first leader, Stern, having been shot whilst escaping from the Latrun detention camp, and they had a long list of outrages to their discredit, including the assassination of Lord Moyne in Cairo in 1944. When they came into the open to fight against the Arabs, their usefulness, like that of the I.Z.L. and for similar reasons, was strictly limited. As a matter of interest Sneh of the Haganah, Begin of the I.Z.L. and Friedmann-Yellin of the Stern Group, had all been fellow students at Warsaw University.

On the other side of the fence the states of the Arab League were formed up, poised to strike. It is very difficult to assess with any degree of accuracy the strengths and conditions of the armies concerned. At first, 'paper strengths' of formidable and gigantic proportions were published by the various Arab governments, perhaps with the dual object of first overawing the Jews and similarly impressing their Arab rivals. As the war progressed, this subterfuge was quickly seen through and the

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inflated nature of the 'official' figures became very apparent. As soon as the true state of affairs began to come to light, the embarrassed governments concerned clamped down on all information about their forces, their strengths, details of equipment and so on, and they have not loosened up since. The figures I am about to quote are, I believe, as accurate as it is possible for an outsider, without any 'inside' information, to make them in the circumstances.

As a result of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, the Egyptian Army was freed of all limitations, but lack of money and of healthy man-power prevented full use being made of this freedom. Generally, about 80 per cent of the recruits were found to be unfit and conscription existed more in theory than practice. The army was organized on the British pattern, a British Military Mission having been appointed in 1936 which remained until 1947. Their equipment was also British, Britain having treaty obligations to supply them with arms and ammunition. For example, it was stated in Parliament that Britain had delivered to Egypt '40 aircraft, 38 scout cars, 298 Bren carriers, and quantities of small arms and ammunition between May 1945 and June 1947'.

Coming to precise facts and figures, in 1939 the Egyptian Army was about 22,000 strong, and the Air Force had about 30 aircraft, but it was planned to raise her army up to a strength of 100,000, with a supporting Air Force consisting of a thousand aircraft, but for various reasons this programme had to be cut by half in 1943. Nominally, the strength of the Egyptian Army in May 1948 was 50,000, but this was 'on paper' only. In fact she fell very far short of that target. Through unfitness, desertions and other reasons, only about 5,000 men served their full term of conscription each year and she was hard put to raise 10,000 men for the initial invasion force. The maximum number that Egypt succeeded in putting into the field during this war was perhaps just under 40,000, and this figure included Sudanese, Saudi Arabians and other volunteers from Libya, Tunis and Morocco.

Almost in the same breath can be mentioned Saudi Arabia,

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as it sent over a small force which operated with and under the command of the Egyptian Army. This kingdom, which had an area of approximately 850,000 square miles and a population of 4,250,000, was ruled over by King Ibn Saud, head of one of the most powerful and influential families in the Arab world, whose main source of revenue was the royalties on the vast quantity of oil produced in his country.

In 1937, King Ibn Saud, inspired by jealousy of his old enemy, Abdullah of Trans-Jordan, whose British-trained Arab Legion was already attracting attention, decided to have a modern army. He set up a Ministry of Defence, with foreign advisers and assistance, but the World War interrupted his plans. Then he had a 'desert warrior' type of feudal army, roughly about 40,000 strong, which was sufficient to police his domain, capable of dealing with tribal uprisings and of repelling raiders from the Yemen.

In 1947, a British Military Mission arrived in Jedda to organize and train a mechanized force of about 10,000 men on the lines of the Arab Legion. But this mission encountered many obstacles and had to overcome many Arab prejudices; and these, together with a shortage of equipment and the fact that many parts of the country were forbidden to them, caused them considerable delay in getting on with the job. The biggest handicap was probably the difficulty in finding officers, as no foreigner was allowed to hold either an army commission, or any executive position for that matter, in Ibn Saud's new army, and there was a distinct shortage of suitable candidates. The numerous relations of the King, and the many hangers-on who, regardless of their lack of qualifications, insisted on officering this new force, did not aid its efficiency. The first detachment of Saudi Arabian troops to join the Egyptian Expeditionary Force consisted of two companies. More followed, and this number was soon raised to six companies; by 1st January 1949 there were at least two battalions of Saudi Arabians on active service with the Egyptians.

To the east lay the Arab kingdom of Trans-Jordan, which the Israelis frankly regarded as their most formidable and

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dangerous enemy; so much so that a secret Jewish Mission, under Mrs. Goldie Mayerson of the political department of the Jewish Agency, was sent to try to persuade King Abdullah not to take part in the pending combined Arab invasion. She failed. What actually took place was never made public but Abdullah apparently did agree, although nothing was announced officially, to invade and occupy only such parts of Palestine as had been allocated to the Arabs under the United Nations' partition resolution of November 1947.

Trans-Jordan had an area of 35,135 square miles and a population of about 400,000. Formerly part of the Ottoman Empire, it was constituted as an Arab principality under a British mandate and the ruler appointed was the Emir Abdullah Ibn Husseini. Being an 'A' type mandate, Britain was obliged to prepare the country for independence which was formally recognized on 22nd March 1946. A mutual treaty of assistance and alliance between Britain and Trans-Jordan was signed, and Abdullah took the title of King. This treaty was for twenty years, and Britain was invited to maintain R.A.F. units at Amman and Mafraq, in return for which, financial and economic assistance was given.

However, the main cause of the Israeli apprehension was the Arab Legion, which had won laurels in the operations in Iraq during the Second World War and was perhaps the most effective fighting force in the Arab world. This was a purely British creation, having originated with a desert patrol, formed by British officers, in 1920. It enlisted in its ranks not only natives of Trans-Jordan, but also Bedouin, Circassians, Palestinians, Druses and even Armenians, and it had been brought to a high state of efficiency and aggressiveness under the able leadership of Glubb Pasha, an ex-British officer who had taken service with the Trans-Jordan Government.

Britain paid a subsidy of £2½ million a year towards its upkeep and, in addition, the treaty catered for the provision of British equipment, arms and training assistance. In May 1948 it was officially stated that there were 37 British officers with this force, of whom the majority were seconded from the



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British Army, but 13 of them were civilians, while 3, including the commander, Glubb Pasha, were Trans-Jordan civil servants, pure and simple.

The strength of the Arab Legion on this date was about 6,000, and it was organized into a mechanized brigade, consisting of three battalions, each about 500 strong, with 17 independent infantry companies, again each about 200 strong. There was also a newly-formed field battery, as well as a training depot which was at Amman.

It was equipped with small arms of British pattern, such as Bren guns, Stens, rifles, 3-inch mortars, Piats, and so on. For artillery it had a few old mountain guns, mostly 3·7-mm. type, but it had recently been sent 8 new 25-pounders, around which it had formed two new 4-gun field batteries—but the individual gunners had little more than three months' training. All told it possessed about 50 British armoured cars, all of pre-1941 vintage. Ammunition was scarce and a recent consignment from the British Suez Canal Zone to the Arab Legion had been impounded by the Egyptians. It had been British Foreign Office policy to keep Abdullah short of ammunition, a policy designed to act as a curb to any possible ambitions that he might have and also to prevent his suddenly attacking one of his rivals.

To the north of Trans-Jordan lay Syria, and the origin of the Syrian Army went back to the days of the First World War, when the French raised an 'Oriental Legion' in Cyprus, composed chiefly of Armenians, which fought against the Turks in Palestine and Syria with some success. In 1919 they raised a 'Syrian Legion' on similar lines, but it did not do as well, so the following year they raised an armed gendarmerie, composed partly of Turks and partly of Arab soldiers who had supported King Feisal, which fought well against the Alouites. This brought the strength of the local Syrian Army up to about 8,000.

After the Druse revolt of 1925-6 the French planned to build up their 'Army of the Orient' to a strength of about 12,000, but it still only numbered about 8,000 in 1939. Immediately after the outbreak of the Second World War, General Weygand increased the strength to about 15,000 and later, when the

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British entered Syria, the French raised an additional Druse Regiment. On achieving independence, the Syrian Government became anxious to increase the Arab element in their army, especially in the higher ranks, in which Circassians and Armenians predominated. A British Military Mission was appointed in 1945 to help to organize and train this army, and Syrian officers were sent to Egypt for training and to attend courses of instruction.

In May 1948 the strength of the Syrian Army was between 7,000 and 8,000, but the only effective formation was a mechanized brigade, which took the leading part in the Syrian invasion of Palestine. There was no general staff, as we think of such things, as for political reasons such a staple organization would have been unwelcome. It is of interest to note that the three officers who in turn led *coups d'état* in Syria, each at one time or another commanded this mechanized brigade. The remainder of the army was in scattered units, most of which were under the influence of their commanders. A flying school had been set up in 1947, under British R.A.F. guidance, and they possessed about 50 aircraft or perhaps a few more.

Immediately to the north of Palestine was the tiny Republic of the Lebanon, with a population of about 1,200,000, of whom roughly half were Christian and half were Muslim. The origin of the Lebanese armed forces was the militia formed by the French after the massacres of the 1860s; and the French, being of the opinion that the Christian natives were better fighting men than the local Muslims, recruited them for preference. But generally, the Lebanese from the cities and towns, whether Christian or Arab, made indifferent soldiers, and in practice Druses, Alouites and Armenians were enlisted.

In May 1948 the Lebanese Army was about 3,500 strong, and consisted of 5 infantry battalions, 5 batteries of artillery, and a detachment each of tanks of cavalry and of armoured cars. In addition, there were about 2,000 armed gendarmery.

The importance of the Lebanon lay not in its armed forces but in its strategic position, and the fact that it provided a base both for the Syrian Force and Kaukji's Arab Liberation Army,

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as well as air-fields and some maintenance and supplies for the air forces of both Syria and Iraq.

The other Arab country which also provided an invasion force, was Iraq, the independent Arab kingdom of Mesopotamia, the Biblical 'Garden of Eden' watered by the Tigris and the Euphrates. It was ruled by a representative of the powerful Hashemite family, the King being Feisal II and the regent being Abdul Illah. Politically, Iraq vied energetically with Egypt for the leadership of the Arab bloc.

The beginnings of the Iraq Army went back to the British conquests of the First World War, when about 2,000 camp guards were employed. In 1919, these camp guards were reformed on military lines and called the 'Iraq Levies', but after the Revolt of 1921 they were again reorganized and their Arab element was eliminated, only the Kurds and Assyrians being retained. These 'Levies' were brought up to a strength of about 5,000, and were organized into cavalry and mechanized squadrons with some infantry, under the R.A.F., which was then responsible for the security of Iraq.

The Iraq National Army, which was an entirely separate body from the 'Iraq Levies', which were completely under R.A.F. control, was started in 1921 on a volunteer basis. It was built up on the British pattern, having an initial strength of about 3,500, most of the soldiers being Kurds. A military college was opened and Iraqi officers were sent both to Britain and to India for courses of instruction and training.

Conscription was approved in 1934, when the mandate terminated, but for political reasons was not put into practice until 1936, when men were called up for two years in the cavalry and eighteen months in the infantry. Exemption could be purchased. In this year the Iraqi Army was reorganized into two divisions and a cavalry brigade with some aircraft in support. The following year schools of instruction for the artillery, cavalry and other arms were opened. The strength of this army continued to rise steadily and was about 41,000 at the time of the revolt in 1941. There were also about 120 aircraft but most of these were destroyed at that time.

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After the revolt the National Army was reorganized and reduced, and in May 1948 its strength would perhaps be about 21,000 men, which figure included the armed gendarmery. The Anglo-Iraq Treaty of January 1948 provided for the continuing use of the air bases of Shaiba and Habbaniya by the R.A.F., in return for which Iraq was supplied with British arms and equipment, which to quote a Parliamentary speech, included 'aircraft, 25-pounder guns, A.A. guns, anti-tank guns and armoured cars'. It could be said that they had at least a hundred serviceable aircraft of various types available for their invasion of Palestine.

The morale of the Iraqi soldier and his fighting potentialities were not considered to be very high. But economic conditions had much to do with this state of affairs, and the Iraqi standard of living and of education was perhaps the lowest of all the Arab countries. The ruling classes looked upon the army as a powerful political instrument, and many of the officers were serving in it for reasons of their own and accordingly had little regard for the care and attention of the men under them. The men themselves were divided by tribal loyalties and differences, their one year of conscripted service being too short either to instil a national pride into them as opposed to a tribal or local one or to infuse into them any great degree of skill at handling their weapons.

An aside, not without interest to the military student, was the fact that the Iraqi deputy chief of staff was sent into Palestine before the mandate ended there, to report on the Jewish forces, and to make any recommendations as to the probable Arab strength that would be required to deal with them. After studying the problem at first hand, he recommended that the Arab states should commit all their available forces, and that a combined Arab high command should be set up at once. Otherwise, he suggested that they had better come to terms with the Zionists. But he was a prophet crying in the wilderness.

So much for the external forces waiting to jump on the Israelis. Inside Palestine the Arab Liberation Army had steadily increased its numbers and by the end of May Kaukji's force

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consisted of about 2,500 Syrians, 2,500 Iraqis, 500 Lebanese and about 150 Yugoslav Muslims, not including the detachment near Gaza which was by this time more properly under Egyptian control. These irregulars were plentifully supplied with small arms and ammunition, the main sources of supply being Syria, where the French had left large stocks behind them, from the Western Desert, where they abounded for the collecting, and from sympathetic Arab countries. He also had a few elderly 75-mm. mountain guns.

The Palestinian Arabs themselves were split politically and most of their leaders had been exiled by the British. At this particular period, when they needed it most, no one personality arose to unite and rally them in their pending struggle against the Israelis. Abdul Kader might have proved to have been such a leader, but he had been killed in the fighting around Kastel, and no man of any outstanding popularity or distinction stepped forward to take his place. True, from a distance, the Mufti still wielded immense influence; but he was banished, and what was wanted was someone on the spot to put some purpose and fire into them.

Under the Mufti's constant urging, the Home Guard had been set up, the strength of which perhaps may have been as great as 50,000. But these formidable numbers were rather misleading for its value as a fighting force was debatable, as the great majority of its members were completely untrained and often unenthusiastic. There were ample small arms of sorts available, as by this time practically every male Arab in the country had acquired a weapon for himself, but most of them were ancient and of dubious reliability and there was an acute shortage of ammunition for the numerous varieties of firearms. It may be true to say that of this Home Guard the majority had only a handful of ammunition, some only half a dozen rounds or so, with little prospect of their supplies being replenished.

Of divided loyalties, hesitant, uncertain and dependent for a lead from outside their own country, the Palestinian Arabs, already badly shaken by the Jewish successes in the 'jockeying for position' phase, were not in a position to put up a sustained

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defence of their hearths and homes, let alone to take the offensive against the Israelis. But at the time few Western observers fully realized this.

In spite of their preponderance of men and arms and their outward unity of purpose, under the surface the Arab countries were divided amongst themselves, their age-old quarrels and rivalries being very much alive and to the forefront of their minds. The two great political rivals were the Hashemite family of Hussein, as represented by King Abdullah of Trans-Jordan and King Feisal of Iraq, and that of Ibn Saud, of Saudi Arabia. Ibn Saud had driven Abdullah's father out of the Hejaz, where he had ruled at Mecca, and this the Husseinis could never forget.

It was widely whispered that Abdullah was ambitious; that he dreamed of ruling over a 'Greater Syria', which would consist of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Trans-Jordan and Palestine, and that he and his family constantly plotted to such an end. Ibn Saud was alarmed at the possibility of such a powerful bloc forming against him and he lost no opportunity of intriguing against the Husseinis, who heartily and energetically reciprocated. Another figure on the scene was King Farouk of Egypt, who longed to be considered by all as the leader of the Arabs; working against him was Iraq who considered that she herself was entitled to the most influential position in Arab politics. Divided they certainly were and suspicious of each others' motives.

The British Foreign Office had always fully appreciated this fact and had done all in its power to sponsor a 'League of Arab States', with an eye to the stability of the Middle East generally and to its own strategic defence requirements in particular. Its efforts were eventually rewarded, and the 'League of Arab States' came into being on 22nd March 1945, when its covenant was signed in Cairo by the representatives of Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Trans-Jordan and the Yemen.

The League's object was to safeguard the independence and sovereignty of the Arab States concerned and to co-ordinate their political action. Abdul Azzam Pasha, an Egyptian, was

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appointed to be its secretary-general, and it was to meet in the different Arab capitals in turn. A meeting was held in Cairo on 9th February 1948 and the members were united in their resolution to do all they could to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state. On April 16th the Arab League again met, this time in Beirut, and agreed to send its armies into Palestine after the British had withdrawn. Emergency consultations took place in Amman, on April 25th, between King Abdullah, the Regent of Iraq, and other leaders, to co-ordinate military measures to be taken against the Jews.

The British Foreign Office hoped that this new association of Arab countries, which they had fostered, would encourage friendship, heal old wounds and weld the Arab bloc firmly together. On the face of it, the Arabs had never been more unanimous in their views.

To summarize: the outlook for the new Israeli state, with its army of perhaps 60,000 still in process of forming, with only enough arms for about a quarter of that number, with no heavy supporting weapons, and with a civil administration barely organized, was not bright. Few military experts cared to forecast optimistically on its behalf.

On the other hand, the overaweing military might of the combined Arab regular armies, which in actual fact may be estimated at between 70,000 and 80,000 troops of varying quality, but at the time was very much inflated by the widely believed 'paper figures' to well over 100,000, was backed by a known total Arab population of over 30 million. In addition, they had quantities of aircraft, artillery and armour available, all of which made an impressive spectacle and caused few to doubt who the victors would inevitably be. For once the Arabs were united in a common cause against a common enemy and most of them looked forward to a short, pleasant campaign in which they would occupy all Palestine at their leisure and eventually exterminate the Jews and confiscate their possessions.

## V

# THE ARAB INVASION

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**T**his chapter covers the second phase of the war, which was the combined invasions of the regular armies of the states of the Arab League. It lasted from May 15th until June 11th, when the first truce came into effect.

First on the scene of these regular armies was General Glubb Pasha's Arab Legion, which crossed the River Jordan at the Allenby Bridge, on May 15th, from whence it moved to Ramallah across country along an earth track up a mountain spur to the west of Jericho. The route followed is generally believed to be that taken by the children of Israel after the Biblical capture of Jericho. In operational command of these troops was Brigadier Lash, a former officer of the Palestine Police under contract to Trans-Jordan.

Quickly the Legion spread out occupying as far west as Latrun, while in the centre it moved south to the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road, and a form of civil administration was immediately put into operation in the area taken over. A detachment moved into Bethlehem by another route while other elements moved southwards towards Jerusalem, where they halted on the outskirts of the city to await the result of the negotiations that were being conducted by a truce committee, consisting of the consul generals of America, France and Belgium. In view of their lack of numbers there was a disinclination on the part of the Legion commanders to commit their troops into a built-up area to take part in street fighting, and they hesitated outside in the hopes that a truce of some sort might materialize.



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. Again for convenience and clarity, it will be best to divide the country up into separate 'battle sectors', and to deal with each in turn, rather than to relate events in a strictly chronological order. These 'battle sectors', showing against whom the Israelis were fighting, can be set out as follows:

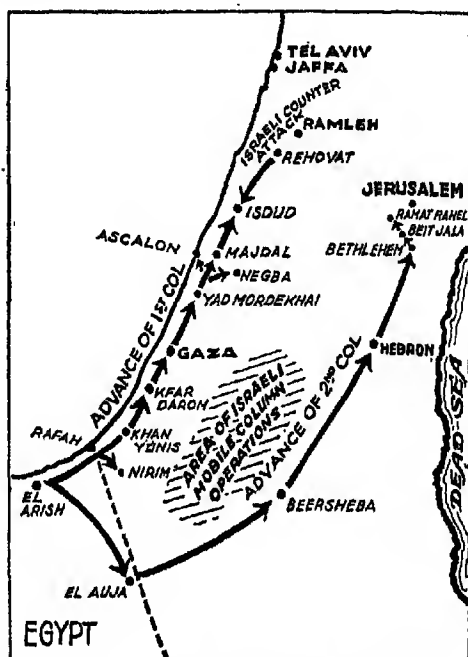
1. *The southern sector*: against the Egyptians;
2. *The Jerusalem sector*: against the Arab Legion;
3. *The north-eastern sector*: against the Syrians;
4. *The Jenin sector*: against the Iraqis;
5. *The northern sector*: against the Lebanese; and
6. *The central sector*: loosely so-called, to include such other operations and actions that do not quite fit into any of the other sectors.

By May 15th the military committee of the Arab League had failed to agree on a united higher command, and as time was now desperately short, King Abdullah of Trans-Jordan assumed the position of commander-in-chief of the Arab Armies in the field. Although this was generally accepted without protest, both Syria and Egypt had private reservations on the matter. Accordingly the opening moves were dictated more by each country's own policy than by a common plan of campaign. Co-operation, in fact, was lacking from the word 'go'.

From the tentative opening moves and the preliminary manoeuvring, confirmed to some extent by a 'master plan' alleged to have been captured later by the Israelis, it would seem that Egypt from the south, and the Lebanon and Syria from the north, were to compress and contain the Israelis, while the Iraqi force and the Arab Legion, in a combined effort, were to force their way across the River Jordan on a broad front, in the area of Geshar, and push on along the Valley of Esdraelon towards Haifa. It was said that King Abdullah anticipated entering that city on May 25th. Jerusalem, it seems, was of secondary importance at the outset, the main priority going to Haifa. The Arabs either deny this—indeed Glubb Pasha declares it to be fictional rubbish—or they are completely silent on any possible major strategical plans they may have had, so if indeed there was a 'master plan', we shall have to surmise

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why it was not put into operation, and content ourselves with reading the story of what actually happened.



Advance of the Two Egyptian Columns into Palestine.  
14th May to 11th June, 1948

### 1. THE SOUTHERN SECTOR

The Egyptian invasion force, under the command of Major-General Ahmed Ali El Mawawi, concentrated in the Sinai, at El Arish, which was just inside the Egyptian frontier adjacent to the Negev. It consisted in all of an armoured unit of Sherman and Matilda tanks, 5 infantry battalions, an M.M.G. battalion, a regiment of 25-pounder guns, some 6-pounder guns and some anti-aircraft pieces with supply and ancillary services. A total

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of about 10,000 men. This expeditionary force was divided into two brigade groups, one slightly larger than the other.

In addition 15 fighter aircraft were placed under command for close support, 5 converted bombers were allotted for transport purposes, and a few light aircraft were attached for reconnaissance duties and artillery spotting.

The Egyptian plan of invasion was that one brigade group, the larger, was to advance along the line of the coastal road and the railway, to take Tel Aviv, while the other, the smaller, was to advance inland, by way of Beersheba and Hebron, to link up with the Arab Legion just south of Jerusalem, so that Egypt would be represented at the taking of that city.

On May 15th both these brigade groups crossed the frontier. The large brigade moved northwards towards Khan Yunis, which was held by Arab irregulars and Home Guard, and quickly occupied the airfield there, leaving a detachment of infantry and artillery to reduce the Jewish settlement of Nirim, which had been by-passed. The other brigade moved off to El Auja and took over the police post there.

The nearest Jewish settlement in the Negev to Egyptian territory was that of Nirim, which was a little way inland, being about four miles from the British camp at Rafah, on the frontier. It was held by a strong platoon of the Haganah, or the Israel Army as it should now be called, and the Egyptians shelled it for some time to soften it up. But although several buildings were destroyed by fire and the blast the defenders were well dug in and were able to give a good account of themselves. After suffering some casualties, the Egyptians broke off the attack, which was a frontal one, and withdrew, leaving Nirim to be contained by the Arab irregulars.

After reaching Khan Yunis, this brigade group pushed on northwards, next coming into contact with the enemy at the Jewish settlement of Kfar Darom, which was about four and a half miles farther on. This was a small village, close to the coastal road itself, near a railway station, and was defended by a garrison of about thirty settlers, plus a small detachment of the Israeli Army. The defenders made good use of natural

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cover and in spite of a heavy preliminary bombardment their well-sited L.M.G's broke up the Egyptian infantry attack almost as soon as it was launched. As time was important, this Israeli position was also by-passed, being left to be looked after by the irregulars and the Arab Home Guard.

The main body moved quickly on, entering Gaza on the evening of the 15th, but from Gaza onwards their advance was much slower. Their next contact with the Israelis was at the Jewish settlement of Deir Senid, which they captured after a ten-hour battle on May 20th. This was their first success, and straight away they moved on to another small victory, this time at Yad Mordekhai. This was another settlement, about eight miles north of Gaza, where the Israelis were well dug in, and where for two or three days they put up a good defence. But by this time the Egyptians were taking things more seriously and they launched a combined attack, after artillery preparation, using their armour to cover their advancing infantry. The result was that Yad Mordekhai fell on May 23rd.

From here the Egyptians went on and occupied the Arab towns of Majdal and Ascalon. After reaching Majdal, the Egyptian commander turned his attention to the large Jewish settlement of Negba, which, being midway between Majdal and Faluja, barred his way to Bethlehem. On June 2nd the Egyptians mounted a full-scale attack, using both artillery and armour to aid their infantry, but the Israelis were in a strong position, and although their buildings were badly knocked about they still held out firmly. When the Egyptian casualties began to increase and no headway was being made the attack was called off, and Negba was left to be contained while the main body moved northwards and entered Isdud.

About five miles to the north of Majdal, just to the west of the coastal road, lay the Jewish settlement of Nitzanin. Initially, this had been by-passed while the Egyptians had moved on to occupy Isdud, but once Isdud had been secured they returned to attack Nitzanin, which they took with a well-planned and well-executed movement, combining the use of both artillery and armour in the support of the infantry. There was some

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fierce fighting and some casualties on both sides before the settlement was finally overrun. This was the third success in battle for this brigade group, and indicated that the various components had got more used to working together and were shaking down as a battle team.

The Israeli defence policy was the stern one of 'no surrender', and every single settlement, no matter how small or isolated, or how hard pressed, was to hold out and to fight to the finish. This was staunchly and faithfully carried out in the Negev, and was a factor the Egyptians had not taken into account. They did not anticipate such tenacious and determined resistance from such small posts, rather expecting, and perhaps hoping, that in the face of such overwhelming superiority the settlers would either hastily evacuate or surrender. They did neither. However, when these settlements did not fall as easily or as quickly as was expected, the Egyptians, rather than be side-tracked from their main objective which was Tel Aviv, correctly left them to be looked after by the Arab irregulars and Home Guard, instead of delaying the advance of their main body.

Mainly, these settlements were near or along the coastal road, the road from Majdal to Bethlehem, and the roads leading to Beersheba, and each one was stiffened with a small detachment of the Israeli Army. In addition to these defensive measures, a small mobile force, on the lines of the long-range desert patrols of the Second World War, operated behind the Egyptian lines, keeping contact with the various settlements and helping them whenever the pressure from the local Arab irregulars became too great. They were able to do this chiefly because the Egyptians were very 'road bound', their troops only occupying narrow strips along the main roads, thus leaving the Israelis free to roam about in the open spaces between.

Isdud, which the Egyptians had entered on May 29th, was only twenty miles from Tel Aviv, and the Israelis realized that the enemy were getting desperately close to their provisional capital. So in an attempt to halt the Egyptian Army, Israeli forces moved southward from Rehovat, managing to take up a

## THE ARAB INVASION

position on a commanding feature just to the north of Isdud by occupying a number of Arab villages from which they ejected the inhabitants before them. Here they came into contact with the enemy and there was confused fighting for some days.

An Egyptian attack on June 7th drove the Israelis from their feature, forcing them back for a mile or so, where a stand was made along a line of Arab villages which were quickly fortified. This check caused the Egyptian troops to halt and deploy. These Israeli positions were subjected to both aircraft and artillery bombardment, under cover of which the Egyptian commander began to regroup his forces in preparation for further attacks. But time was slipping past and no other movement of any importance took place in the area of Isdud, except for patrol actions, before June 11th, on which date the first truce came into effect.

Meanwhile, the second Egyptian brigade group moved from El Auja through Arab territory towards Beersheba, which it entered on May 20th. From Beersheba it continued northwards through Hebron to Bethlehem, which was handed over to it on the morning of May 22nd by the Arab Legion.

So far this brigade had advanced without contact with the enemy, but now, on the 22nd, it moved out at once against Ramat Rahel, which was about two miles to the north-east of Beit Jala, near the railway, and was in fact the southernmost point held by the Israelis in their New Jerusalem defensive layout. They shelled it and followed up with a flanking attack, supported by artillery fire, causing the defenders, after putting up a stout resistance for some hours, to withdraw; whereupon the Egyptians moved into Ramat Rahel. However, the Israelis who had just withdrawn met some reinforcements coming from New Jerusalem and the two parties joined up, returned and made an attack. By making good use of familiar ground, they managed to oust the Egyptians who were in possession, and by nightfall they had retaken the place.

In the days that followed there was some fighting in this area, each side having varying success, although generally the Israelis managed to retain what they originally occupied. Ramat

## THE ARAB INVASION

Rahel, and positions adjacent, changed hands several times; little else, except some patrolling, was done in this sector. So the advance of the inland Egyptian brigade group petered out just on the southern outskirts of Jerusalem.

To summarize the fighting in the southern battle sector at the end of this phase of the war: the Egyptians moved along the coastal road as far as Isdud, taking three Israeli settlements, Deir Senid, Yad Mordekhai and Nitzanin, and occupying the Arab territory as they advanced, finally coming into contact with the Israeli Army proper just to the north of Isdud. On the face of things the picture was fairly rosy. Their first attack against Israeli troops had been successful as they had driven the enemy from his commanding feature to the north of Isdud; and although they did not manage to break through the Israeli-held line of fortified villages, nothing had happened to shake the confidence of the Egyptian Army in itself or to cause the Egyptians to doubt that its fighting ability was not superior to that of the enemy. They had been in the process of regrouping for a deliberate attack and had accepted the truce reluctantly.

The way of the inland brigade group had been made easy, chiefly because it had moved through Arab territory and had not hit against any of the defended Jewish settlements. Bethlehem had, of course, been given to it by the Arab Legion. It had a first success against Ramat Rahel, and although the fighting around this area produced no gain in ground, its morale was by no means dampened down.

Generally, the Egyptian campaign had gone as well as its commanders had dared to hope in view of the unexpectedly stiff opposition. It was their first experience of handling such large numbers of troops on active service and they were finding out their mistakes as they went on. Their teething troubles were many, their lines of communication were well extended, faulty equipment was coming to light, staff duties still required to be co-ordinated, and communications left much to be desired. Most important of all, the Egyptian regimental officer had yet to get down to 'roughing it' with his men. On the credit side, the Egyptian soldier had shown encouraging fortitude in action.

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The Israeli settlements had all put up a determined and pugnacious defence, only three being overrun. The Israeli mobile column still held the field behind the Egyptian lines, or rather between the main roads along which the Egyptian troops were in position, keeping contact with their isolated villages and boosting the defenders' morale.

When the initial attacks by the Egyptians against these settlements failed, rather than become inveigled into being delayed by such tactics they by-passed them and continued their advance northwards. Much capital was made in a critical press about these failures, but on behalf of the Egyptians it must be said that in the early stages they nearly always put in a casual, frontal assault, hurried and ill-prepared, which played into the hands of the defenders with their well-sited L.M.G's. Also, at first, their expenditure of artillery ammunition was excessively heavy and to little good purpose. But as they progressed they appreciated the seriousness of the situation more accurately and learnt by their mistakes; they put in well-planned, conventional attacks, with frontal holding fire and flanking movements, supported by armour and artillery fire, which had more success.

### 2. THE JERUSALEM SECTOR

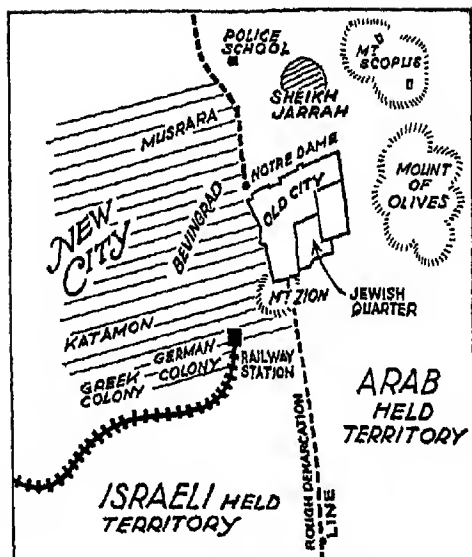
In this battle sector took place the fighting between the Arab Legion and the Israelis in and around New Jerusalem; it included the taking of the Old City and the various actions that were fought around Latrun.

In New Jerusalem the fighting broke out as soon as the last of the personnel of the British administration left on the morning of May 14th, the first Israeli objective being 'Bevingrad'. This was the district which had been previously occupied by the British troops and other officials, and contained the police headquarters, the G.P.O., the prison, the bank and other government buildings, and was so nicknamed by the Jews after the unpopular British Foreign Secretary.

In this first move the Israelis were one step ahead of the irregular Arabs, who were lurking in the shadows waiting to



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Jerusalem

jump in the moment the British troops moved out. During the last night of the mandate, in order to discourage any acts of terrorism or sabotage by either the I.Z.L. or the Stern Group, by a special arrangement Haganah sentries went on duty and doubled up with the British sentries and they tacitly remained where they were the next morning. After the British had gone, the rest of the 14th was spent by the Israelis in completing the occupation of the buildings evacuated by them, which they were able to do fairly comfortably, aided as they were to a large extent by the many Jewish sentries who had stayed put.

On the 15th, Colonel Shaltiel, the Israeli regional commander, divided his available forces into three columns, with the object of quickly capturing all Jerusalem outside the walls of the Old City itself.

After completing the occupation of 'Bevingrad', the first column took the adjacent Russian compound, and then turned

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its attention to the prominent buildings grouped to the east, near the city wall, of which the French Hospice of Notre Dame was the most formidable. This was a fortress-like structure, commanding the road north to Ramallah, which had been built by the French in the days of Turkish rule to house and protect their pilgrims. The Notre Dame was held by a band of about 200 Iraqis and the first assault by the Israeli column failed, but later in the day, under cover of a diversionary attack, another attempt was made which succeeded.

The second column moved off towards the north and first took the Italian hospital, after which it assaulted and captured the police school, which was on the west side of, and overlooking, the road to Ramallah. From there it launched an attack across this road on Sheikh Jarra, which also fell after some fighting before the end of the day, thus allowing the Israelis to link up with their previously isolated Mount Scopus positions.

The third column moved from the Katamon ridge, taking and occupying in turn the Greek colony, the German colony, the railway station and the three barrack buildings in that area.

By the evening of May 15th practically all Jerusalem outside the walls of the Old City, to the north and west, was in Israeli hands. The Arab irregulars, mostly Iraqis and Syrians, without central control or united leadership, had melted away before the determined Israeli advances. The Arabs still occupied the Old City, except for the Jewish quarter, and the area outside the walls to the east from, and including, the Mount of Olives round to Mount Zion, which was south of the city. There were, however, still a few bodies of irregulars holding fast in and around the area between Notre Dame, St. George's Cathedral and the Damascus Gate, where some fierce fighting took place on the next day, the 16th.

Late on the evening of May 15th advanced elements of the Arab Legion arrived outside Jerusalem, where they remained at a short distance. But Glubb Pasha saw that the whole of Jerusalem, both Old and New, and the surrounding district, were in danger of being overrun and occupied by the Israelis if something was not done quickly to check them. So on May 16th

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the Arab Legion moved into action, its first objective being the village of Sheikh Jarra.

When Colonel Shaltiel had captured this village and the police school, being extremely short of armed men for defence he asked the I.Z.L. if they would garrison these two places for him. No doubt he assumed that with their type of training and their experience of house-to-house fighting, they would be just the men to hold these two outposts against the Arab Legion, which was advancing on him from the north. But he was disappointed, for in spite of their ferocious reputation they did not put up a very stiff defence, and the Arab Legion was soon in occupation of Sheikh Jarra. Thus, once again, communication between the Mount Scopus position and the New City was severed. Next, Glubb Pasha's men turned west and took the police school, and again the opposition was not nearly as hard as was expected when it was learned that the I.Z.L. were holding it.

On the next day, the 17th, a Legion column moved out from the police school southwards, and mounted an attack on the district known as Musrara, a built-up area. At first their advance was unopposed but they soon ran into trouble and there was heavy fighting just north of the Mandelbaum Gate. After some time, the attack was called off and the Arab Legion withdrew.

To digress: the Mandelbaum Gate, in spite of its imposing name, is today merely the ruins of a building constructed by an individual of that name, at one of the intersections of the 'Street of the Prophets'. It has since achieved considerable prominence as it is the only point between Israel and Jordan at which there is any 'official contact', and it is here that visiting V.I.P's, United Nations' officials, journalists and travellers are allowed to pass from one country to another.

On the following day, May 18th, another Arab Legion column with some armoured cars advanced from Sheikh Jarra towards the Notre Dame building. On approaching the Israeli positions some of these armoured cars were knocked out by direct hits and after some indecisive firing the assault was not

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pressed home and the Arab Legion withdrew. There was also fierce fighting in the Musrara district, which was now the only bit of the New City proper still held by Arabs.

After this the fighting simmered down for a few days, the Arab Legion having far too few men available to start a systematic house-to-house clearance; a kind of stalemate set in, with the Israelis occupying the New City to the west of a 'north-south' line drawn through the Mandelbaum Gate and the Arabs occupying the territory to the east. Undoubtedly, the timely appearance of the Legion did much to stabilize matters for the Arabs, and its presence contained Israeli ambitions and kept them in check.

The Notre Dame building was a key point, dominating a large sector, which caused the Arab Legion to make several attempts to take it. On May 21st another attack was mounted which fizzled out, as by this time the Israelis had several L.M.G's and two M.M.G's in position. The strong-point itself was commanded by an ex-British Army major, who had organized its defence on sound lines.

On the 23rd yet another attempt was made, which came very near to success. Under cover of a smoke screen, ten armoured cars advanced with infantry closely following behind. The Israelis scored a few hits with their Piats of which they had two. But at the moment when the attack should have been driven home, it was discontinued and the Arab Legion withdrew. The Israeli officer in command in the Notre Dame afterwards admitted that had this assault been continued it would have had a very good chance of being successful, as his ammunition was extremely low and his garrison included many partially trained men, some of whom had become a little jittery. Here was an opportunity lost, as possession of this key-point offered many tactical advantages.

The next day another attempt was made, this time by a more circuitous approach, but the small arms fire from that commanding position prevented the Arab Legion from getting close enough to enable their infantry to launch an assault. Still another effort was made on the 25th, which was also unsuccessful.

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ful, and after that the fighting tended to quieten down, as the supply of ammunition was beginning to become a problem for both sides. The Arab Legion brought up their 25-pounder guns and contented themselves with shelling the various Israeli defensive positions, which resulted in the unfortunate Jewish civilian population catching many of the 'overs'.

Meanwhile in the Old City, the Jewish quarter, which was wedged between the Mosque of Omar and the Armenian quarter, with the Dung Gate leading directly into Arab territory as its only external exit or entrance in the City Wall which constituted its southern boundary, still held out. The larger part of the Old City was a rabbit-warren of solid masonry, with strong buildings and narrow, winding streets and alleyways, which had been deliberately so designed centuries ago with the object of ensuring that no building was in direct arrow-shot of another.

Although Colonel Shaltiel had been dubious as to whether the Jewish quarter would be able to hold out indefinitely, the Israeli political authorities had ordered the defenders to fight to the finish. Before the British left detachments of the Haganah and a party of I.Z.L. had infiltrated in to stiffen the defence and to boost morale. The majority of the Jewish inhabitants were poor fighting material.

On the evening of May 13th the British troops withdrew from their positions in the Old City and the Israelis took over many of their posts, especially those around the Jewish quarter. They also occupied the tower of the Greek Church in the adjacent Armenian quarter, but at the request of the Patriarch they later evacuated this vantage point on the condition that he did not allow any Arab troops to take possession of the tower itself, which overlooked the Jewish quarter. But in spite of this assurance, the Arab irregulars did get possession and were thus able to enfilade the Israeli defenders. At this early stage the attacks were by irregulars, mostly Iraqis, and were mainly from the north and the north-west, but as they were unco-ordinated and haphazard, although there was a heavy rain of mortar-fire and sniping, the Israelis were able to hold their own.

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On May 15th the garrison of the Jewish quarter consisted of about 200 Haganah (now Israeli Army), plus about a hundred members of the I.Z.L., all of whom were supplied with a reasonably adequate number of small arms. In addition they had a few small mortars.

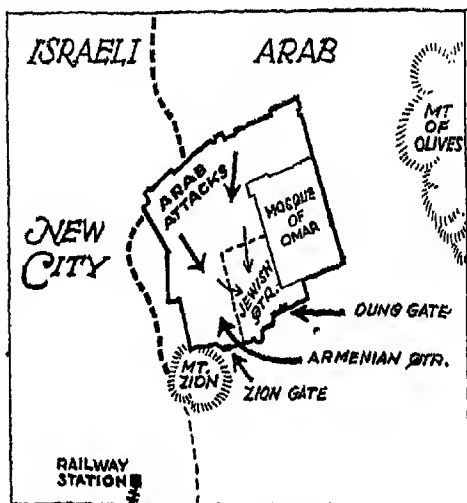
Colonel Shaltiel fully realized the acute situation of the defenders, cut off as they were from all contact with New Jerusalem. He evolved a plan which was, basically, to force and hold the Zion Gate, which was in Arab hands but the nearest to the New City, and then transfer the whole of the Israeli population from the Jewish quarter to the adjacent Armenian quarter. Then they would be in a far sounder tactical position and still have a foothold in the Old City, so from a prestige angle all would be well. To carry out this plan, he needed the Palmach to help him, but not being regional troops, they were not under his absolute command, and he had some difficulty in persuading them to agree. There was some argument, the Palmach commander not being too keen on the task, as he considered that the risk was too great in the circumstances. However, Colonel Shaltiel eventually persuaded him to make the attempt.

On the evening of May 18th two platoons of the Palmach attacked and occupied Mount Zion, the buildings around the Tomb of David and the Church of the Dormition, all of which were just outside, and covered, the Zion Gate. That night a detachment of the Portzim, the assault engineer section of the Palmach, advanced and blew open the Zion Gate, which was lightly held at the time. The men of the Palmach quickly rushed forward to secure it and were able to hold it while contact was made with the defenders in the Old City. A reinforcement of 80 men and quantities of ammunition, which was getting short, were moved in.

But this attack was not followed up or properly supported, and in the face of Arab pressure, the Palmach, who had never been very enthusiastic about the operation, withdrew again, allowing the enemy to regain control of the Zion Gate. Thus, the Jewish quarter was still cut off and Colonel Shaltiel was not

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able to carry out his proposed transfer of the Israelis to the Armenian quarter. In fact, for all the effort and planning, little had been gained except that the garrison had been reinforced and its ammunition supply replenished. The siege continued and supplies had to be dropped on the defenders from the air by night, at least one batch of which fell into Arab hands.



Jerusalem: Siege of the Old City

The defenders continued to fight off the attacks of the Arab irregulars with some degree of success, but once the Arab Legion entered the Old City the pattern of the fighting underwent a change of character. In a business-like manner, the Legion concentrated on the north-west corner of the Jewish quarter, putting down heavy mortar-fire on a co-ordinated plan, closely backed by infantry, who took full advantage of the fire to rush from building to building. Also, it was bombarded by the Legion's artillery, which was situated on the Mount of Olives.

Gradually the Israelis were forced back, house by house and

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street by street, and as the days went by they were compressed, into two large structures. It was estimated that about 800 were squeezed into the Ben Zakkai Synagogue, while 700 were in another building. They were completely cut off, and under constant shell and mortar fire, with supplies and ammunition running low. Their position was hopeless and the Israeli commander was wounded, but they continued to resist bravely for a few days longer under these extremely severe and trying conditions, eventually surrendering to the Arab Legion on May 28th.

The conduct of Glubb Pasha's men at this surrender was particularly exemplary. Of the Jewish defenders, about 400 or so of the soldiers and the able-bodied of military age were taken off to Amman as prisoners of war, while the remainder, about 1,300, were returned to Israeli territory. These prisoners were protected from the local Arabs and the irregulars, and at the initial surrender the Arab Legion men actually had to fire into the mob that surged round them, thirsting for the blood of the Jews whom they wanted to slaughter out of hand, to keep it back.

The defence of the Jewish quarter was a heroic one against hopeless odds and it is usually put down to a gross military error that such a situation should have been allowed to develop. Tactically, it was not a sound proposition to try and hold an area which was so far removed from the main defensive positions, but the principle of 'fight to the finish' was vitally necessary to the nation of Israel at that moment, if it was to survive. An epic such as this was the tonic it urgently needed. A tame evacuation would probably have adversely affected fighting morale and perhaps would have led to the abandonment of other tactically unsound positions which in actual fact held out successfully, especially in the Negev.

In the New City by the beginning of June we find the Israelis attempting to take the offensive in a modest way. On June 4th they mounted an attack on Sheikh Jarra, which had some initial success as it took the Arab Legion rather by surprise, but it soon petered out and the Israelis were repulsed.



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During this period, in spite of several attacks by Israeli troops, the Musrara quarter, near the Mandelbaum Gate, still remained in Arab hands. On the evening of June 8th it was again assaulted, this time by two separate columns of the Palmach, aided by a heavy mortar screen. The battle lasted all through the night and by dawn the next day most of the Musrara quarter was in Israeli hands.

Immediately after this success, on June 9th, the Palmach made another attempt to take Sheikh Jarra so that they could link up with their Mount Scopus position. But before they reached their objective the Arab Legion counter-attacked the advancing column, causing it to scatter, and the Israelis were driven back into their own lines again. That little operation brought to a close the activities in this area, in this phase of the war. Throughout, the Arab Legion had been pounding away at the enemy defensive positions with their 25-pounder guns, causing a heavy toll in casualties.

Towards the end of this phase, Colonel Shaltiel began to feel the blast of unpopularity and became the subject of criticism, no doubt largely as a reaction to the loss of the Jewish quarter of the Old City about which he had strongly recommended evacuation. He was also blamed for not taking sterner measures against the looters, who were particularly active in the Katamon area and now included Jewish property in their depredations. On the other hand, it was felt by the public that he was too ruthless with the civilian population and had too little sympathy with their outlook. The difficulty of his position was forgotten, as was the fact that he had only nominal authority over most of the troops in his region, while all the responsibility for the conduct of the war in Jerusalem was heaped on his shoulders.

Near Jerusalem were the two gallant Jewish settlements of Atarot and Nve Yacov, just off the main road to Ramallah where the Arab Legion headquarters was. Their blood was on their own heads. Had they been content to keep quiet and remain within their own defensive positions, they might well have been there today. But instead they were rather too strongly

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imbued with the policy of 'offensive-defence', and they constantly sallied out to put down road-blocks and generally to indulge in sniping at the many Arab Legion vehicles that passed by them.

The Legion, being fully extended and having far too few men anyway, might well have left them completely alone if they had not tempted fate too far. However, their nuisance value was their undoing as it gave them a priority, forcing the over-worked Legion to take action against them. The settlement of Atarot was accordingly attacked and taken on May 16th. Then for a time Nve Yacov was quiet, but after a few days the settlers became restless and again began to put out road-blocks, so on May 23rd the Arab Legion put in an assault which overran the settlement. In both cases the Israelis slipped away at the last moment and not a lot of fighting took place.

Also to be briefly mentioned is the evacuation of the Jewish settlement at the north end of the Dead Sea, close to the Palestine potash works, which was a Jewish project. As soon as the Arab Legion crossed the River Jordan, Glubb Pasha initiated an agreement whereby if the Jews demilitarized the works, he would guarantee their safety. But it was completely isolated and in a very poor tactical defensive position for it could neither be very easily supplied by boat across the Dead Sea nor was there much chance of its being reinforced and defended with any degree of success. Accordingly, on May 19th, the settlers evacuated by boat across the Dead Sea to Sodom, near the southern end, after setting fire to the various buildings they left behind them.

On the Tel Aviv road, the vital and hotly disputed link between the coast and New Jerusalem, the situation was that, on May 15th, the Israelis controlled this road, and the heights on either side of it, from Lifta, which was on the outskirts of New Jerusalem, almost as far as the defile of Bab El Wad, but the section between Latrun and Ramleh was firmly in Arab hands. Thus from a Jewish point of view the road was effectively blocked to them.

The Arab Legion, realizing the importance of this section of

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the road, were soon in Latrun, stiffening the resistance of the local Arabs, and they occupied strong positions in and around Latrun police post and also in the nearby Trappist monastery, which gave them control of the gorge-like part of the road for about three miles above that point.

It was decided to attack Latrun in an attempt to break the Arab stranglehold on this artery. The Israeli high command was dubious about the whole project but Ben Gurion insisted and an attempt was made. A brigade was hastily formed for this purpose at Na'an (called the 7th Brigade), and a scratch lot of troops were mustered together, the majority of whom were untrained men from eastern Europe drafted straight from the immigrant ships. The officers were also a mixed bag, and the whole formation was only together for three days before the attack was ordered to be launched. Then, owing to the non-arrival of some half-tracks and armoured cars, it was ordered to be postponed for twenty-four hours.

Finally it was begun on the evening of May 26th, but nothing went right. There was a shortage of equipment, such as water bottles and containers, which had to be waited for, and then through misunderstandings (over eight languages were spoken by the men of this brigade, and few understood Hebrew) for some hours the men sat waiting in transports before moving off into the battle zone. Psychologically, this was very poor management of raw troops waiting for their first action.

It was planned to launch a frontal attack by night from the road. The brigade was four hours late in crossing its start line, by which time the Arab Legion, sensing that something was in the wind, had been alerted, with the result that the Israelis ran headlong into their fire. Searchlights picked out the attackers and silhouetted them and a solitary mountain gun on the roof of the police post wrought havoc. After vainly trying to advance, the Israelis wavered and then broke. The assault was a horrible failure, and it was estimated that at least 800 casualties had been incurred by the Jews, while it is doubtful whether the Arabs suffered any.

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However, courage was not wanting, and somehow the Israeli brigade was pulled together and re-formed and the next night another attack was tried. But the Arab Legion were waiting. The same lines of approach, which had proved to be so unsuitable the previous night, were foolishly used again, with similar disastrous results. Again, they had to withdraw with severe loss, leaving the Arabs firmly in possession of Latrun. The road to Jerusalem was still blocked.

With the fall of the Jewish quarter of the Old City, the Israelis, in a desperate attempt to open the road, made another attack on May 30th. Again, great individual bravery was shown but little tactical appreciation. Another frontal assault was put in. Like the others, it proved to be a bad failure and the Israelis left 114 dead and at least four of their armoured vehicles behind on the field of battle, as well as much equipment. After that, both sides glared at each other for a time. The Israelis brought up their only two 65-mm. guns, and some 3-inch mortars, and the combatants contented themselves with shelling for a few days. The single Arab gun on the roof of the police post worked overtime.

During this period no Arab Legion reinforcements were sent to Latrun, but as the Israelis continually attacked night after night, several requests were made to the Iraqi Army, which had meanwhile moved into the Nablus sector, to carry out some form of diverting operation in the Tulkharm area in order to relieve the pressure. The Iraqis, however, replied that they were not in a position to help in this direction.

Towards the end of the fighting around Latrun in this phase, an American colonel, David Marcus, appeared amongst the Israelis and began to organize them. Under his guidance and drive the fighting flared up again. They began to launch a few smaller-scale attacks, better planned from a tactical point of view, but they gained no ground and they paid for their daring and inexperience with heavy casualties. But the benefit gained by this hammering away was that the pressure on Jerusalem was relieved and attention was directed on Latrun.

It was on June 9th, the last night of the fighting in this area

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in this phase, that Colonel Marcus was killed, being shot by mistake by one of his own sentries. His death was a great loss to the Israelis as they were all too short of experienced officers and he was one of the few who had practical knowledge of warfare. In the short time he had been with them he had built up a reputation for daring and leadership, and his appearance on the Latrun front did much to stabilize a very precarious situation.

It was Colonel Marcus who brought his infantry into the battle zone in jeeps, rather than allow them to be carried a limited distance in civilian buses or lorries, and then have to march fully laden the remainder of the way before taking part in an assault. This idea of 'mounted infantry' carried in jeeps appealed to the Israeli commanders at once, and they quickly developed it on a large scale. It proved to be extremely advantageous to them in the latter stages of the war, especially in the south.

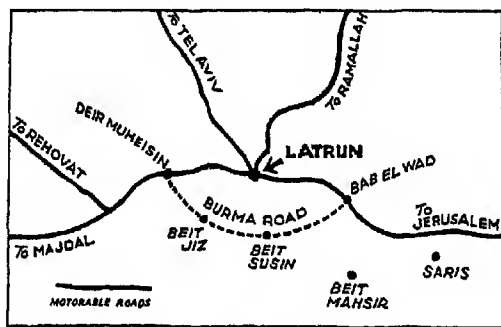
The continued failure to take Latrun was a severe blow to the Israelis, especially as the supply situation in Jerusalem was becoming critical. As an interim measure, a detachment of the Palmach marched by night across the hills, carrying on their backs some of the supplies that were more urgently needed.

When they saw how hard a nut the Arab Legion position was to crack, it was decided to build a detour, to the south of the main road in this area, from Deir Muheisin to Bab El Wad, both of which were by this time in their hands, a distance of about six miles. This was done secretly; and as a prelude, to clear the path and to maintain secrecy, the Arab villages of Beit Jiz and Beit Susin were taken and the inhabitants ejected.

With much hard work and ingenuity, what was merely a rocky goat-track was made into a route just passable for wheeled vehicles; and on June 6th the first stores and supplies moved along it, although they had to be man-handled at one place for a short distance, where the road was not quite finished, and transferred to vehicles waiting on the other side of the obstruction. In spite of much sweat and hard work, this route, which became known as the 'Burma Road', was not

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really ready until the day before the first truce, when the first convoy from the coast drove right through into Jerusalem. This 'Burma Road' was very vulnerable in several places where it was dangerously near to Arab-held Latrun; and there was evidence that Glubb Pasha had learnt of its existence and its exact location, and was preparing to cut and ambush it.



Latrun By-Pass ('Burma Road')

That completes the account of the fighting in the Jerusalem sector up until June 11th. In summary: although the Israelis had established a land route through to Jerusalem from the coast, thus forcing a chink in the Arab blockade, generally things had not gone too well for them. To begin with, they had taken the initiative in the New City and had quickly spread out, taking, amongst other places, Sheikh Jarra which linked them up with their Mount Scopus position.

The appearance of the Arab Legion on the scene changed their fortunes. Glubb Pasha's men speedily recaptured Sheikh Jarra and the police school from the much-vaunted I.Z.L., after which they compressed the Israelis back into the New City where the fighting bogged down, the Arab Legion, with its limited number of men, wisely not becoming too involved in street fighting. The heroic defence of the Jewish quarter of the Old City was of great moral value to the Israelis at a time when they needed such a boost, and counter-balanced their disap-

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pointment at not being able to retain a hold in the traditional City of Jerusalem.

To the west, their failures at Latrun against the Arab Legion were severe setbacks. In their first attack, to use untrained troops in a frontal assault by night was an over-ambitious plan. Night operations require a high degree of co-ordination and training. The tactical scheme was also poor, and did not cater for any supporting fire or for the use of any reserves. They did not learn by their failures and the same mistakes were repeated. The presence of Colonel Marcus did much to better their position, but the general lack of organization and the drop in morale were big obstacles to overcome. They committed the folly of under-estimating their enemy, which they paid for with heavy casualties.

### 3. THE NORTH-EASTERN SECTOR

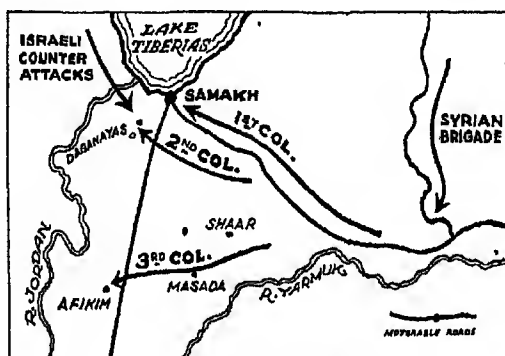
In this battle sector the fighting was chiefly but not completely, against the Syrians, who attacked in two places, their main assault being launched in the area of Samakh, on the southern shore of Lake Tiberias, while the other was a little farther north, being aimed at Mishmar Hayarden, which was just south of Lake Huleh. Included as well is a mention of the Arab Legion in the vicinity of Gesher to the south, while to the north there was the Lebanese action against Malikiya and the Syrian attacks on Nabi Yusha. Mention must also be made of the isolated Jewish settlements of Ein Gev and Shajara.

In the main Syrian thrust the mechanized brigade, which in reality was the only organized formation of its size in the Syrian Army, moved down from the Heights of Jaulan towards the south end of Lake Tiberias. It split into three columns, the first, which was the strongest, being directed against Samakh; the second against the twin Daganayas, two villages just a little farther west than Samakh; while the third column moved towards the road running south from Samakh towards Beisan.

On May 16th Samakh was attacked from the air and was also bombarded by artillery, and on the 17th the Syrians put

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in a full-scale infantry assault supported by both armour and artillery. This attack was well co-ordinated and directed and on that day the Syrians succeeded in getting good footholds for their final assault. The Israelis fought back and reinforcements were rushed up to the fighting zone from Tiberias, but even so Samakh fell on the morning of May 18th. However, the Israelis fortified themselves in the buildings of the Jewish-owned hydro-electric works, just to the west of the town, which they succeeded in holding on to in spite of several Syrian attempts to drive them out.



Syrian Fighting. Initial Phase

To the second or central column, reinforcements were sent from the first column when it became clear that the Israelis could not easily be pushed out of the hydro-electric works. On the 19th, an assault on the twin Dagayanas was begun, mainly by infantry supported by artillery. But this attack was more disjointed than the previous one and by this time the Israelis had assembled more strength to meet it. During the day, for the first time in the war, Israeli aircraft intervened in the battle, and by machine-gunning and bombing they slowed down the Syrian advance. More Israeli reinforcements were scraped together and sent to the battle area, and to this front were allotted, and quickly dispatched, their two 65-mm. guns, together with a flame-thrower—their only one.



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On the 20th the Syrians resumed their attack on the twin Daganayas; this time it was led by their light armoured vehicles some of which actually penetrated the Israeli defences. The two 65-mm. guns came into action and, firing at point-blank range, put several enemy armoured vehicles out of action. Others were dealt with by Molotov Cocktails when they got sufficiently close. This bloody nose caused the armour to withdraw, whereupon the infantry, who had followed up closely, also halted. This momentary pause was responsible for some casualties from Israeli small arms fire, while at one point where the Syrian troops had got fairly near, the solitary flame-thrower suddenly flared into action. It worked to good effect.

Thus checked, and finding that they could not continue the advance without armoured support, the Syrian infantry withdrew from the twin Daganayas, giving up even what ground they had gained. Three light tanks, four armoured cars and other equipment was left behind on the field of battle. This, in fact, brought the whole Syrian offensive to a halt in this area.

Of the third, or southern, column there is little to report. It was the weakest, being only about 300 strong, and when the three villages of Shaar Hagulat, Masada and Afikim did not surrender or easily fall, although elements of this column reached the road from Samakh to Beisan, its original objective, it had become wastefully deployed and even scattered. Consequently it achieved little.

Just to the south of Lake Huleh there was a bridge over the River Jordan with a Jewish settlement near by, called Mishmar Hayarden. A smaller Syrian force planned to seize this bridge, take Mishmar Hayarden, and then push forward to cut the road from Rosh Pina to Hulata, and then to advance westward in conjunction with Lebanese attacks from the north. Its object was to make contact both with the Lebanese forces in the north and Kaukji's Arab Liberation Army in the west, as well as to isolate the several Jewish settlements that lay in the Huleh Valley northwards. Then the way to Safad, which was in Israeli hands, would be open.

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This Syrian column suddenly descended upon the bridge, seized it, and after a short, sharp skirmish, took the village of Mishmar Hayarden, which was developed into a fortified bridgehead. This accomplished, the column attempted to advance westwards; but after a few minor successes it hit against the stiffer Israeli opposition along the line of the rising ground, two or three miles to the west of the River Jordan. After one or two unsuccessful attempts to break through, the Syrians settled down to consolidate what they had gained, and action died down around Mishmar Hayarden. In which state things remained for the rest of this phase of the war, chiefly perhaps because both sides in this area had, it seems, low priorities, no reinforcements were available to be sent to their support and so neither was able to make a decisive move of any sort.

Continuing northwards, the Israelis essayed a limited offensive, which resulted in their taking the police post and village of Nabi Yusha, on May 17th. This was important because of its great strategical value in controlling this part of the frontier. When the British had withdrawn from the district, the local Arabs had taken possession. Already, on April 20th, before the termination of the mandate, the Haganah had made a desperate attempt to seize it, only to be driven back with loss of life.

Next, the Israelis turned their attention to the frontier post of Malikiya, on the Lebanon border, which they took by a surprise assault. But they had only been in possession for a few days when they in turn were attacked by the Lebanese, who drove them out and occupied the post themselves. This assault on Malikiya was the solitary Lebanese success of the war, and it consisted of an infantry attack by about 800 men, with only mortar support. Not much can be deduced from this action as the victory was perhaps as much due to overwhelming numbers as to any other factor. Sufficient details not being available, it is not possible to analyse with any accuracy why for the remainder of the war the Lebanese forces were so ineffective, when they had taken Malikiya in their stride.

Although the Syrians put in several attacks on it, the police post at Nabi Yusha continued to be held by the Israelis, thus

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preventing the Syrian forces from joining up completely with the Lebanese troops.

Much farther to the south, but still in the same battle sector, close to where the River Yarmuk flows into the River Jordan, was a police post on the Palestine side of the frontier, which had been taken over by the Israelis. Opposite to this, in Trans-Jordan, was a similar police post, which was occupied by a detachment of the Arab Legion.

On May 15th firing across the River Jordan began between these two posts, and a small arms duel developed. Who started the ball rolling is hard to determine as each side blames the other, perhaps both were genuinely under the impression that the other was about to advance and attack. As soon as this came to the ears of Glubb Pasha, whose main problem was only too obviously farther south, he ordered his men to stop firing, but to remain where they were, and by late afternoon the action died away.

The heroic defence of Ein Gev, on the eastern shore of Lake Tiberias, was typical of that of many Jewish settlements and villages. When the Syrians advanced towards Palestine on May 14th it became completely isolated, its only contact being by boat across the lake by night.

The surrounding hills were occupied by the enemy and it was shelled continually, but the defenders were well dug in, and although most of the buildings were destroyed by blast, it held out doggedly, the settlers having to live underground practically the whole of the time. On two or three occasions the Syrians made half-hearted advances which soon fizzled out when they ran into determined small arms fire. After these unsuccessful attempts, apart from the shelling, Ein Gev was left alone.

The defence of another Jewish settlement in this battle sector is worthy of mention as a classical example of 'offensive-defence', a military policy to which so much lip-service is paid but about which often so little is done. This was Shajara, which was about ten miles directly west of Tiberias, just in the terri-

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tory controlled by Kaukji. Although closely invested by the Arab irregulars, instead of sitting down and doing nothing, part of the garrison sallied forth to mount an attack on the nearby Arab village of Lubiya, which barred the way to Tiberias.

This enterprising assault, although by very small numbers, showed some signs of being successful, and had not Kaukji quickly rushed some reinforcements along to stiffen its defence, Lubiya would probably have fallen to the Israelis from Shajara. By showing its teeth in such an aggressive manner, Shajara was left in peace for the remainder of this phase.

### 4. THE JENIN SECTOR

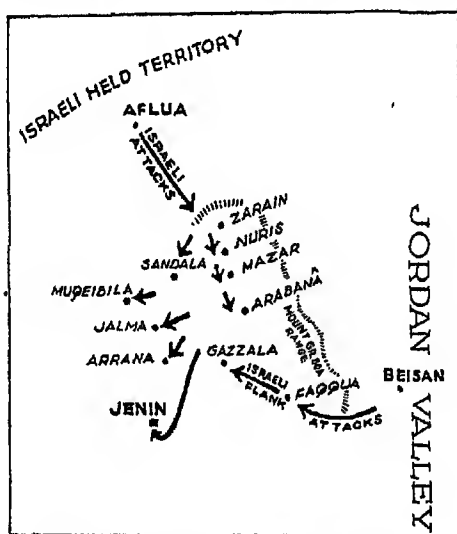
The Iraqi contingent, under the command of General Taher, concentrated in Trans-Jordan, near the Palestine frontier, just before May 15th. It consisted in the first place of one armoured car regiment, and one infantry battalion, but as time went on its strength increased, to a small armoured or mechanized brigade and about seven or eight battalions of infantry, together with three squadrons of aircraft in support. A total strength perhaps of between 8,000 and 10,000.

Against Arab Legion advice it attempted to cross the River Jordan roughly opposite Beisan, which was Israeli-held, and failed to do so, suffering some casualties in the process. Originally the Arab Legion had allotted one infantry battalion for the defence of the Nablus sector, but when the fighting developed in Jerusalem this unit was badly needed there and it was suggested that the Iraqis took over from it, which they agreed to do. Whereupon the Iraqis withdrew from the position they were in near the River Jordan opposite Beisan and came down through Trans-Jordan territory, round by Jericho and up into the Samaritan Triangle where they made their headquarters at Nablus. The Arab Liberation Army was moved farther north to look after Galilee. To the north, the Iraqis spread out as far as Jenin, whilst in the west they extended to Tulkharm, only ten miles from the sea, and even a little nearer in the area of the Jewish town of Hadera. The Arab irregulars still continued to

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hold the Mount Gilboa Range, and many other villages around which acted as a sort of protective screen for the Iraqis. In this position, they had an extremely long line of communications which ran back through Trans-Jordan and their supply services, unused as they were to such operations, were hard put to maintain such a large body of troops in the field.

On May 28th the Israelis started to advance on Jenin from Aflua by taking the Arab village of Zarain, which was on the



Jenin Sector. Iraqi-held Territory, Samarian Triangle

northern tip of the Mount Gilboa Range, and causing the Arab irregulars to evacuate the nearby village of Nuris. After pausing to deploy, the Israelis resumed their offensive on June 2nd, on which day they took the villages of Sandala, Arrana, Jalma and Muqeibila, which formed a sort of Arab defensive shield just north of Jenin itself.

On June 3rd the advance on Jenin proper was made. At the same time a diversionary movement was made on the east

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flank by another Israeli force which moved out from the area of Beisan and seized the two Arab villages of Gazzala and Faqqua. In the main attack there were two columns, each about 450 strong, which moved southward to find that the town of Jenin was deserted, the inhabitants having fled, but that the police fortress, which was in a strong, commanding position, was held by Iraqi troops. So far, in this sector, the Israelis had only come into contact with the Arab irregulars and local Home Guard, who had not at any time put up a very stiff resistance.

One Israeli column seized and occupied a hill to the south-west of the police post, while the other column got on to another hill to the south-east. The Iraqis opened fire on the south-east column, which as the ground was open, rocky and bare, was unable to take cover or get much protection, and accordingly suffered heavy casualties, but it stayed where it was. The other Israeli column was in a slightly better tactical position, and although under fire from the police post too, was able to continue to advance, managing to penetrate into the outskirts of the town before the enemy fire became heavy enough to force it to a standstill.

In the afternoon Iraqi reinforcements came up from Nablus and a counter-attack was made, supported by aircraft, which pushed back the Israeli column that had penetrated the town, forcing it to retire, leaving several dead behind. After that there was some confusion on the Israeli side, and one column in an attempt to manœuvre itself into a better position, ran head first into enemy frontal fire. When the Israelis had been ejected from the town of Jenin, the counter-attack was discontinued and the Iraqis returned to the police post.

Later in the afternoon some Israeli armoured cars came up, and another attempt was made to assault the Iraqi position, but again it was beaten back. Things were not too well under control and in the evening the Israelis withdrew, leaving the Arabs in complete possession of Jenin. This was a serious setback, for while the Jewish casualties had been very great, those of the Iraqis were practically negligible. The Iraqis did not under-

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take any offensive operations in spite of being urged to do so by the Arab Legion to relieve pressure on Latrun, and there was no more action of any importance in the Jenin sector before June 11th.

Briefly commenting on the Iraqi part in this phase of the war, one can only wonder at the general inaction of such a large body of troops. They merely stepped into positions vacated by Glubb Pasha's troops and by Kaukji's men who were pushed out to make way for them, and they made no attempt to extend their territory. Their one clash was that at Jenin, which resulted in an Israeli defeat, but as they held all the aces and the Israelis walked into their fields of fire and generally used little tactical common sense, they could hardly claim that it was the result of any particular skill on their part. Their brief counter-attack, their only offensive movement, was successful, but it was extremely limited and was not followed up.

A judiciously-timed, strongly-supported counter-attack, delivered when the Israeli troops were reeling under their first hard blows, would have enabled them either to wipe out the attacking force, or to scatter it completely. Had a determined counter-offensive immediately followed, who could say what far-reaching successes would have been within the Iraqi grasp? It was a case of a golden opportunity lost merely for the lack of aggressive spirit and energy.

From the Israeli point of view, their failure emphasized that they were not yet fully trained and in many respects still needed a final polish, and that in this sector at least they required more tuition in elementary battlecraft. The Israeli commanders in the field were not above criticism, as their two jumping-off points, the two hills to the south of the police post, were badly chosen, they were open and rocky, and afforded sparse cover from enemy fire. Also, the approaches were poorly selected. Command and communication left much to be desired.

Another fault was over-confidence. Before attacking Jenin, the Israeli troops in this sector had only been up against Arab irregulars and local Home Guards, who had not put up a very tough resistance, and had usually pulled out after firing a few

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rounds. Sufficient account was not taken of the difference between these types of Arabs and trained regular soldiers. Of this action the bravery of the Israeli soldiers under fire was the redeeming feature.

### 5. THE NORTHERN SECTOR

A successful Israeli offensive took place in the northern battle sector, centred round the capture of the seaport of Acre, which barred their way northwards from Haifa. The old Crusader town was surrounded on three sides by the sea, and the Old City itself was encircled by an old, but still fairly stout and serviceable, wall, inside which the prison building was the most prominent strong-point. Outside, was a police post on the sea-shore. The Arabs concentrated inside the Old City, as well as holding the police post.

On May 16th the Israelis, under Colonel Carmel, advanced from Haifa and occupied Napoleon's Hill, a feature which overlooked Acre from the east. The operation began by heavy fire being poured into the Old City from this point. Small craft in the harbour also fired into Acre. The Israeli infantry then advanced into the assault, but were held up by the Arabs in the police post. Psychological warfare was brought into play and loudspeakers were used in an effort to undermine the defenders' morale, and to try to persuade them to lay down their arms. A prisoner was sent into Acre to demand that the garrison surrender.

On the 17th another attack was put in on the police post, which was found to be abandoned. The Israelis quickly took possession, consolidated and made preparations for their final assault. Meanwhile, heavy mortar and small arms fire was kept up on the defenders. Next day the pressure was still kept up, but Acre held out and the Israelis in the more exposed positions suffered some casualties caused by Arab snipers. However, that night a priest came out of the city to ask for the conditions of surrender, which were accepted a few hours later. Thus, after a siege of 72 hours, Acre fell to the Israeli forces



## THE ARAB INVASION

under Colonel Carmel, and the complete Arab population evacuated the city.

From Acre the Israelis pushed on northwards towards the Lebanese frontier, which they reached on May 23rd, where they halted. No action of any importance took place during this advance, the Arab irregulars giving away at all points before them, and thereafter, during this phase, this sector remained quiet.

### 6. THE CENTRAL SECTOR

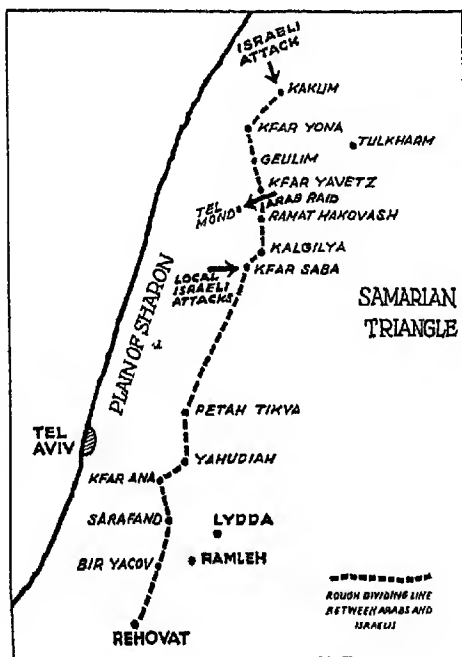
This included the area around Tel Aviv, and to the north where the Plain of Sharon, which was mainly in Israeli hands, bordered on the western edge of the hilly Samaritan Triangle. To the Arabs on these hills overlooking this fertile coastal strip the temptation was too much, and there were in the first few days several raids and forays made towards it and its settlements, mainly by the irregulars, aided by the local Arabs.

In the northern part of this battle sector assaults were tentatively tried along the line of Ramat Hakovash, Kfar Yavetz, Kfar Yona and Geulim, but in every case the Israeli defenders held fast, and as soon as the Arabs realized that they were up against a determined defence they did not press home these attacks. During this period the Israelis made one small offensive and captured the village of Kakum, which they occupied and turned into a defended base for operations against Tulkarm, where the Iraqis were in strength. A little farther to the south, in the vicinity of Kalgilya, after an initial assault by the Arabs which was soon abandoned, the Israelis pushed the enemy back a short distance, managing to take and hold the Arab village of Kfar Saba. But heroism was not a monopoly of the Jews by any means and the tenacity was not completely on the Israeli side. There were several instances of Arab villages, right down on the coastal plain and sometimes in contact with the Israeli Army, holding out with equally grim determination.

Nearer Tel Aviv, with the object of making a defensive screen round their provisional capital, the Israelis undertook a series

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of minor operations. Perhaps 'mopping-up' operations would be a good description, as they were all conducted against the irregulars who, as soon as they realized that the Arab Legion was not going to advance to help them hold the ground they occupied, withdrew, often with only token resistance. A start



Central Sector

was made on May 19th, when the evacuated British camp at Sarafand, which had been occupied by Iraqi irregulars, was taken by the Israelis, as well as the nearby village of that name. Next, in turn, they took the villages of Yahudiah and Kfar Ana, and by June 11th they held a firm front along the rough line from Sarafand to Yahudiah, and on to Petah Tikva, thus

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shielding Tel Aviv and making it more secure against attacks from the hills to the east.

The main reason for the general lack of action in this battle sector was the fact that the Arab Legion, which was in the southern part of it, was over-extended. The attention of General Glubb Pasha was focused on the more important strategic points of Latrun and Jerusalem, and the necessity of conserving his men was forcibly brought home to him the hard way. He could not spare any men for an offensive into the Plain of Sharon, no matter how limited. In the northern portion the inactivity of the Iraqi regular contingent has already been remarked upon.

In these days, battles are usually influenced and at times even decided by air intervention, but this was not so to any great extent in this war. Even so, a few words about this arm of the service will not be out of place. The only countries with any offensive aircraft at their disposal were Egypt, Syria and Iraq, but their full weight was not brought into play, nor was any co-ordinated scheme for using their resources to the best advantage agreed to.

In the Egyptian sector, in the south, a few close-support aircraft took part with the ground forces in attacks against Jewish settlements, and other places were bombed and machine-gunned spasmodically. Egyptian Spitfires raided Tel Aviv on May 15th and thence afterwards daily, and sometimes even more often. In the first air raid an Egyptian aircraft was brought down by a lucky shot, and its pilot became Israel's first prisoner of war. The early arrival of a batch of anti-aircraft guns enabled them to put up a defence against these raids, which were mainly of nuisance value only; although casualties were caused, they did not seriously disrupt life in Tel Aviv. Syrian and Iraqi aircraft were also used in the areas in which their troops were operating. The Arab Legion had no offensive aircraft, possessing only two two-seater Moths.

Looking at the other side, aircraft began to come into Israel, the first being a number of Messerschmitts which were not too

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well handled, two being shot down by the Egyptians and others crashing. But more aircraft of other types quickly followed up and were more skilfully used, enabling the Israelis to show their teeth. Their first bombing attack was made on Samakh, on May 19th, and on June 1st they made their first raid on Amman, in which they dropped a few H.E. and some incendiary bombs. As their numbers of aircraft increased they intensified their attacks on the nearer of the Arab cities and towns. Jerusalem, for the time being, escaped raids from the air from either side.

Generally, the deduction can be made that air power was not a decisive factor and did not have much direct influence on the outcome of any of the operations or actions in this phase of the war.

Looking at the overall picture of the fighting during these six weeks, the Israelis generally had been on the defensive except in the northern sector. Their opponents had done most of the attacking.

Glancing at the map, the Arab gains seemed to be tremendous, and in fact, with very little fighting, all Arab Palestine was in their hands. To the south, the Egyptians had advanced as far as Isdud and Bethlehem, although they left Jewish settlements still holding out in their rear as well as a small mobile force operating between the main roads. In the centre, the Arab Legion had retaken Sheikh Jarra, taken the Jewish quarter of the Old City, contained the Israelis in the New City, and had occupied and held Latrun, and that part of the road it commanded. To the north, the Lebanese had taken Malikiya, and only Nabi Yusha prevented their linking up with the Syrians.

The alleged 'master plan' did not materialize, probably partly because of the unexpectedly stiff resistance put up everywhere by the Israelis, and partly because there was little co-operation between the invading Arab states. The Arab field commanders generally were half-hearted, and did not exploit such success as they had. Moreover, the various Arab countries had put into the field only very small forces. Only Trans-

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Jordan was wholeheartedly and fully committed to this war.

Towards the middle of this phase it became obvious that the Arab plan to capture Haifa, which the opening moves indicated was more than a possibility, was changed, and Jerusalem was given the priority. Perhaps it was widely assumed that this city would be put under some sort of international régime. Certainly Glubb Pasha seemed to be under this impression.

Although the Arabs had been halted by the Israelis, they had suffered no major disaster, and had no convincing proof that they were not superior to their enemy in the field. Indeed, their successes at Jenin, Isdud, Sheikh Jarra, the Old City, at Latrun and other places gave them the idea that it was simply a matter of carrying on to ensure that final victory was theirs.

From the Israeli view things had not gone too well; but they had gone well enough to confound their critics and to give the Israeli Army confidence in itself.

They had four notable failures, Latrun, Jenin, Sheikh Jarra and the Old City. But they had some excuses, and at this stage they had only small arms and home-made mortars to fight with. At Latrun raw troops were used at night to make a frontal attack, whereas in the circumstances, perhaps a daylight flanking movement, with covering fire, would have had more chance of success. Jenin again was due chiefly to lack of experience, both in the correct use of ground and cover, and in command and control in action. The Jewish quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem had been a forlorn hope, while Sheikh Jarra had been handed over for defence to the dissident organizations, of whom it was expected that their training would have suited them for such a task. Perhaps it was fortunate for the Israelis that these organizations showed up their true worth in the field, and in action generally, so early in the war.

On the credit side, the Arab invasion had been halted, although that fact was not quite so clear at this stage, and the State of Israel had stood against the combined regular Arab Armies. Actually, little ground had been taken from them. The Syrians had invaded and advanced a little way, the Arab Legion had gained a small amount of territory around Sheikh

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Jarra and, of course, the Jewish quarter of the Old City, while the Egyptians had taken three settlements in the Negev. Against this, Arab attempts to break through into the Plain of Sharon had been repulsed, and the northern exits of the Samarian Triangle had been stopped up.

## VI

### THE FIRST TRUCE

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**T**he first truce came into effect at 8 a.m. (local time) on 11th June 1948, and lasted for four weeks. Generally, it was obeyed fairly promptly all along the line by both the Arabs and the Israelis, with only minor infringements to record.

The Israelis eagerly welcomed it as it gave them valuable breathing space which they desperately needed to build up and to train their armed forces, and to absorb the quantities of war material that were beginning to pour in in an ever-increasing stream. The new Jewish state had survived the original onslaught, but it was as much due to lack of Arab determination as to any other one reason. Now she got on, in a business-like manner, with sorting out her civil administration, asserting her central authority and with the organization of a proper national army.

The Arabs were not so happy about the truce. They realized, more than anyone, that with the advent of this truce the State of Israel was a definitely established fact, and that their dream of driving the Jews into the sea was fading away.

Secretly, the commanders of the Arab troops fighting in the field must also have welcomed this breathing space, especially the commanders of the only two armies to be committed to any extent, the Arab Legion and the Egyptian Army. The Arab Legion had been more than fully stretched out, its armoured cars were badly in need of maintenance and its ammunition supplies were dangerously low, while the ammunition of the Egyptians was almost expended. With all the Arab armies,

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except the Arab Legion, much had been found wrong, far more than most of them cared to admit, and they were only too anxious to be given time either to put things right or to cover them up. They were as much afraid of their Arab rivals discovering their weaknesses and shortcomings as they were of revealing them to their formal enemies, the Israelis. Forcibly, it had been brought home to the Arab soldiers that they were up against a far harder nut than many of them had been led to expect, and they realized that the war was not going to be a walk-over.

To get the complete picture it is best to go back a little and to relate the major political events that had been happening in Israel while all this fighting had been in progress. On the afternoon of 14th May 1948, in the Museum Building in Tel Aviv, Mr. Ben Gurion, speaking on behalf of the Jewish National Council (Vaad Leumi) and the General Zionist Council, read out the declaration of independence, proclaiming the formation of a Jewish state, to be called 'Israel' (Medinath Yisrael).

Pending the setting up of duly elected bodies, the National Council was to act as the Provisional State Council, and the National Administration, then in being, was to be the Provisional Government of Israel. A Cabinet of twelve members was formed, with Ben Gurion becoming the first Prime Minister, and in addition taking on the portfolio of Minister of Defence. America granted *de facto* recognition within minutes of the announcement, which, while pointing to some prior knowledge of what was happening, also indicated that she was anxious to get in first so that she could be considered to be its sponsor, and so be a jump ahead of her rival, Russia. It was election year in the United States and the Jewish vote had to be carefully nursed. Three days later Russia granted *de facto* recognition, being the second country to do so. At intervals other countries followed suit.

Meanwhile, in the United Nations Assembly, on May 20th, Count Bernadotte was appointed to be their mediator in Palestine, and he arrived in Paris on the 25th to receive his instructions, before eventually setting up his headquarters on



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the Island of Rhodes. A member of the Swedish royal family, he was head of the Swedish Red Cross, in which organization he had been very active during the Second World War. From the very beginning he was unpopular with the Jews, partly because they believed that he was of a pro-British disposition and partly because he was alleged to have had Nazi sympathies. As soon as he got into the saddle he concentrated on trying to persuade both sides to agree to a cease-fire.

A British resolution in the General Assembly of the United Nations, calling for a truce in Palestine, was carried on May 29th, and both sides were ordered to cease fire for a period of four weeks, under the supervision of Count Bernadotte, the mediator, who was to have the assistance of a team of military observers. The Israelis were quite willing to accept this truce. At first the Arab League refused but later, on June 1st, they were persuaded to agree.

Briefly, the main conditions were that both sides should stay put where they were, while during this truce there was to be no movement of troops or of war material, either in Israel or any of the Arab countries. No fresh fighting men were to be introduced into Israel, and only such male immigrants of military age as were approved by the mediator were to be allowed to enter the country. Count Bernadotte had a staff of about 70 officers—Swedish, French, Belgian and American—to help him. Throughout this truce there was an uneasy quiet along the front lines, occasionally punctured by incidents caused first by one side and then by the other, which kept the United Nations' team of military observers more than busy, as it was their task to try to control and investigate such happenings.

In Israel, on May 20th, a state of emergency was formally declared throughout the country. Then two essential laws were passed, a defence order and a control of man-power ordinance. The defence order authorized conscription in times of emergency, and decreed that the National Army was to be composed of the land, air and naval forces, under a combined general staff. Everyone in these forces was to take the oath of allegiance to the state, and it forbade the creation or maintenance of any

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other armed forces in the country. The Control of man-power ordinance was very like measures that had been in operation in war-time Britain, and authorized the mobilization of everyone between the ages of 17 and 55. All males between the ages of 18 and 36, in certain settlements, unless actually serving with the army, were immediately drafted for agricultural work, and persons of 17 years of age were to be called up in the summer for two months' military training.

Already, on May 15th, the whole of the reserve of the Palmach had been called to the colours, and the field army was gradually mobilized as fast as equipment became available. Week by week, cadres expanded into battalions, and then battalions into brigades. In fact, the whole legislation and system that was brought into force by the Israelis bore a remarkable similarity to that which had been used in Britain during the Second World War.

On May 28th Israel Defence Order No. 1 was promulgated, and the National Army was formally established. Both the air section and the naval section of the Haganah came under its command as from that date. In addition, an auxiliary womens' service was formed. Women had been active members of the Haganah from the early days, but now they became recognized as a separate service, and were attached to either the land, air or even the naval forces, as required. They were given elementary basic training in handling small arms.

The defence order had expressly forbidden armed organizations in Israel, and it was during the first truce that a showdown occurred. On April 27th, before the end of the mandate, an agreement had been ratified between the Haganah and the I.Z.L., whereby the I.Z.L. was to constitute a separate brigade, under its own officers, within the framework of the Haganah. It was to submit to Haganah discipline and was to obtain prior approval before undertaking any operations on its own. After the proclamation of independence, the I.Z.L. and the Stern Group came out into the open, but remained intact as formations. Nominally, they were subordinate to the Jewish high command, while in fact they virtually pleased themselves about

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whether or not they fell in with the local Haganah commander's orders.

On June 8th a government spokesman, referring to appeals abroad for financial assistance by the I.Z.L. and the Stern Group, said that since both organizations had voluntarily dissolved themselves, and that their members had joined, or were about to join, the National Israeli Army, those still purporting to raise funds for them as fighting forces were guilty of fraud. He said that all parts of the National Army were financed from a central fund, and that none could claim separate assistance.

The I.Z.L. answered that it was not dissolved, but that it had merely promised not to continue as an 'underground' movement in areas under Jewish control. It was, it said, still an active political party, while in Jerusalem it would continue as an armed force until that city was ruled by the Jews. For these, and other, reasons it would continue to collect money. The members of the I.Z.L. became even more perturbed when it became known that they were only to be allowed to serve temporarily under their own officers. Both the I.Z.L. and the Stern Group had protested strongly at the Israeli acceptance of the truce, which they loudly denounced as a 'shameful surrender'. To this Ben Gurion had firmly replied that his government would not permit anyone to break the truce.

The I.Z.L. had collected a quantity of arms abroad and they informed the Israeli Government that these would be arriving on a ship called the *Altalena*, together with about 900 recruits. Apparently, the government had only been told by the I.Z.L. about this ship because they required help to unload its cargo. It was demanded that 50 per cent of the arms and ammunition on board should go to the I.Z.L. fighting in Jerusalem, and that the remainder should be equally divided between the Israeli Army and the I.Z.L. units. Ben Gurion would not agree, and ordered all the arms and ammunition to be handed over to the National Army; he said that if this were not done stern measures would be taken.

On June 22nd, in open defiance of the government, which issued a decree declaring civil disobedience to be treason, the

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I.Z.L. brought this ship to Tel Aviv. Just previously, they had unsuccessfully attempted to unload its cargo a little farther to the north, but had only been able to disembark the 900 recruits, when the attitude of the local Israeli Army personnel caused the *Altalena* to move away from that area.

Ben Gurion ordered Israeli troops into action to prevent the I.Z.L. unloading their arms ship, and to reinforce the local commander, Colonel Ben-Gal, a brigade of the Palmach from the Latrun area was hastily brought into Tel Aviv. There was some confused fighting in which 15 men were killed, and during which the *Altalena* was sunk by mortar fire. A drive was made and hundreds of the I.Z.L. were arrested, although most of them were released again in due course, the majority fairly quickly. The I.Z.L. leaders announced that the ship had contained over a million rounds of small arms ammunition, 300 Bren guns, 5,000 rifles, 50 anti-tank guns, 1,000 grenades and 9 tanks. If this was true, it was a serious loss to Israel at a critical time, but in disobedient hands such arms would have been a serious menace to the new State.

As a result of this incident it was decided that the I.Z.L. would no longer be allowed to continue serving under their own officers, and a committee, headed by Ben Gurion, was set up to reorganize the army on a completely national basis, with a strong central command. The using of force against fellow Jews caused a minor Cabinet crisis, but Ben Gurion courageously made his point, public opinion was in his favour and he carried the day.

On June 28th the oath of allegiance was taken by the army, and most of the I.Z.L. took it as well, so for practical purposes the I.Z.L. ceased to exist as a separate armed force, except in Jerusalem. The Palmach still retained its own headquarters and distinctive character, but apart from those exceptions, the whole Israeli Army was unified.

On the day the oath of allegiance was taken by the army, security was relaxed to some extent, and the names of the various commanders and senior officers were made public. The chief of staff was Brigadier Yaa'acov Dori, who had been the

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chief of staff to the Haganah, while the chief of military operations and planning was the 30-year-old Colonel Yigal Yadin. Brigadier Chiam Ladkin, aged 35, was appointed to command the air force, while Commander Mordechai Limon, aged 27, the youngest of the senior officers, was appointed to command the navy. Most of the area and district commanders and other members of the staff were comparatively young men.

In June a unit larger than a brigade was set up, called a 'front', which could be compared with a 'corps' of a European army, varying in strength as it did according to the task in hand and the circumstances. There were four of these 'fronts', which were:

*The first front*, the northern one, which covered Galilee and the northern border of the Samarian Triangle;

*The second front*, which extended from Zochron Yaacov to Petah Tikva, and covered the western border of the Samarian Triangle;

*The third front*, which covered both Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, including the road between the two cities;

*The fourth front*, the southern one, which extended from Nes Ziona, south and east, including all Israeli-held territory from the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Akaba.

The regional nature of these 'fronts', or corps, is apparent, but their boundaries were not as rigid as were those of the regional brigade areas, which formerly made up the defence pattern of Israel. They had more flexibility, both of movement and of command, all troops in a 'front' being directly under the control of the front commander, whereas, in the former regional brigade areas some troops were under the brigadier's control and some were not.

Good use was made of the truce period for regrouping and deploying the Israel Army, in readiness for the resumption of hostilities. The main move was that the Palmach brigade, under Colonel Alon, was brought down from Galilee to the Latrun area, and the 'Anglo-Saxon' brigade was sent north to replace it. The small settlement of Kfar Darom, in the Negev, which

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had so far held out successfully against the Egyptians, was evacuated on July 8th.

From the beginning the Israeli soldiers had been clad in a miscellany of khaki uniforms of British and American patterns. Taking their cue from the *élite* Palmach, they had neither badges of rank nor any distinguishing insignia, nor did they bother overmuch about formal military procedure or discipline.

When it came to the consideration of reorganizing the whole army on sound lines, on which to build for the future, there were two conflicting schools of thought. One wanted a kind of 'revolutionary' or 'people's' army, without ranks, saluting, or any military pomp or ceremony, while the other wanted a more conventional army. The Palmach had been run on 'unconventional' lines, without military trimmings and irksome discipline, and it was pointed out how successful it had been, and many advocates urged that the future national army should be formed on a similar pattern.

The conventional school, which consisted chiefly of officers who had seen regular service in the armies of other countries, were horrified, and pointed out that the Palmach was a small body of volunteers, the pick of the country, strongly imbued with an ideal and politically educated, under good and experienced leaders. Conscription, they said, would bring the inevitable watering down of the quality and purpose of the men available, and the specialized 'Palmach conditions' would no longer obtain. Also, the handling of large bodies of troops, under active service conditions, required the exercise of strict discipline and control, if units were not to disintegrate under enemy pressure.

Fortunately for Israel, Ben Gurion favoured the conventional type of army. But not so Israel Galili, his deputy defence minister, who had been the head of the Haganah, and who had seen no regular army service. There was a brief clash between the two men, and Galili resigned. Ben Gurion assumed the position of commander-in-chief, and the Army of Israel was built on a pattern very similar to that of the British Army, in which so many of the Israeli officers had served. Some of the

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senior officers, again primarily those who had seen no 'regular army' service, impressed by the performance of the 'unconventional' Palmach, were reluctant to make the change, but a compromise was reached, and gradually they all came round to Ben Gurion's way of thinking.

The Palmach, where the 'irregular' tradition was the strongest, was acutely disappointed by Ben Gurion's policy, but eventually they got over it, and to give them some measure of compensation they were allowed to retain their own headquarters and special organization a little longer. They had to take their share of conscripts into their ranks, but they were allowed to be selective to a certain degree, so that Palmach still continued to retain its *corps d'élite* qualities.

As soon as he could, Ben Gurion put his proposals into effect. Ranks were introduced, officers' messes were opened, differential scales of pay for the different ranks were brought in and a disciplinary code was enforced. As an example of formal militarism the Israeli military police uniform was exactly similar to that of the British military police.

There are one or two other events worthy of a brief mention as they reached the world headlines for a fleeting moment. Notably, there were two casualties amongst the members of the United Nations' Truce Commission. On May 22nd an American member, Mr. Watson, was shot by an unknown sniper in Jerusalem, while on June 6th a French observer was killed when his jeep ran over a mine.

On June 30th the last British troops left Haifa, and the docks were taken over by the Israelis.

An incident that gained some publicity happened on June 6th, when Mr. Sylvester, the acting general manager, and five other British officers of the Jerusalem Electric and Public Service Corporation, were kidnapped from their offices, which were under the protection of the United Nations' Flag, by the I.Z.L. and handed over to the Israeli Army to be tried on charges of spying. To follow this incident through to its conclusion, they were brought before a Tel Aviv magistrate on August 10th, when three were released for lack of evidence.

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Sylvester and two others were remanded for trial in Jerusalem, which took place on October 8th, when Sylvester was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for publishing information calculated to be useful to the enemies of Israel. The other two men were freed, and in due course Sylvester's sentence was quashed on appeal.

Finally, the dignity of the United Nations was severely shaken on July 9th, when, despite protests, the Israelis took over the King David Hotel, in Jerusalem, which was considered to be under its protection.

On the other side of the cease-fire line the Arab States, in spite of the seriousness of the situation, were unable completely to sink their differences; on June 7th, for example, King Farouk complained to the mediator about the size of the respective flags displayed by some of the Arab forces in the field which, he said, 'led to complications'. They were uneasy and abashed by the fact that the individual weaknesses and limitations of their armies had been exposed to the world and, worse still, to each other. The Arab Legion was the only force that had no need for recrimination.

In an attempt to bring about a co-ordinated war effort, King Abdullah of Trans-Jordan paid a series of visits to his neighbours. Already, on May 20th, there had been a meeting on the Syrian-Trans-Jordan Border between King Abdullah, the presidents of both Syria and the Lebanon, the Regent of Iraq, and other Arab military leaders. Azzam Pasha, the secretary of the Arab League, had also been present.

On June 22nd he went to Cairo to visit King Farouk, and while he was there he had an interview with the Mufti of Jerusalem, whom he had not seen since the Mufti escaped from Palestine in 1937, to avoid arrest by the British. But they could not come to any agreement. On June 27th King Abdullala visited his life-long enemy, King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, whom he had not seen for over twenty-five years, when Ibn Saud had driven Abdullah's father from Medina. On July 1st he visited the Regent of Iraq in Baghdad.

There was some public outcry about the fact that there were



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British officers serving with the Arab Legion and actually taking part in the fighting against the Israelis. The British Government bowed to world opinion, and declared on May 27th that no serving British Army officer was then fighting with the Arab Legion, and that steps had been taken to ensure that no seconded British officer would become involved in action in this war again. The British Government, of course, had no control over the 'local contract' officers, and such British officers who were Trans-Jordan civil servants. On June 3rd Britain revoked all arms export licences, which affected most of the Arab states. Under political pressure the British Government also withheld the payment of the Arab Legion subsidy.

The withdrawal of British officers from the Arab Legion was perhaps one of the hardest blows of all as at that early stage every unit except one was commanded by a British officer. The force was organized into two small brigades, and both brigadiers (Goldie and Ashton), brigade majors, staff captains and all the 'G' Staff officers at Lash's headquarters were regular officers. The local contract officers, with the exception of Glubb and Lash, were all engaged in administrative duties.

The result was that in the middle of a heavy period of fighting the brigade commanders, staff and all C.O's (but one) suddenly disappeared. It is only to be wondered that the Arab Legion did not crack up and the personality and leadership of both Glubb Pasha and Brigadier Lash stands out all the more clearly.

Arab troops during the truce were fairly static, each of the armies merely regrouping within its own sector. The Iraqi Army 'spread' a little in its position in the Samarian Triangle, and Kaukji's Arab Liberation Army was contracted and withdrawn still farther northwards.

The main truce condition that there was to be no movement of military materials and no reinforcing of the armies in the field was blatantly ignored by both sides. Efforts by the officers of the Truce Commission to enforce this were futile, and they had their work cut out dealing with the numerous incidents that flared up along the cease-fire line.

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Egypt, who had found much wrong with her army, was busy reorganizing and reinforcing. Her field force was stepped up to about 18,000 all ranks, and included more volunteers from the Sudan and North Africa, as well as more Saudi Arabian troops. Her ammunition stock was replenished and more 25-pounder guns and 4.2-inch mortars made their appearance on the ground, as did more Spitfires in the air.

The Iraqi contingent swelled during the truce to about 15,000 all ranks, although this number included four battalions of Palestinian Arabs, which they raised locally, and numbers of Iraqis who 'rejoined' from Kaukji's Arab Liberation Army, with which so many of them had been serving. Both Syria and the Lebanon carried out extensive recruiting campaigns, and their respective forces in the field were increased.

With the Arab Legion it was mainly a problem of manpower. The men of the garrison companies which had been formed under the British administration to guard installations, were attached to and gradually absorbed into the mechanized regiments (as their battalions were called). But the garrison companies had been allowed to run down and such men as remained were soon absorbed. Recruiting went on and a few members of the disbanded Trans-Jordan Frontier Force were accepted, but the overall numbers did not increase in any great proportion. During the truce part of the Arab Legion had to be withdrawn into Trans-Jordan for internal security reasons, and its effective numbers in the field were reduced from about 5,000 to 4,000.

The ammunition shortage began to be severely felt towards the end of the first phase, especially by the artillery, and as supplies did not come in a daily ration had to be allocated to the guns. When it had become obvious that fighting was about to begin, Glubb Pasha signalled to the British G.H.Q. in Egypt, asking them to load a ship with ammunition and to send it round from Suez to Akaba. This was done but as the ship was leaving port it was overtaken by an Egyptian Government vessel which made it return to harbour where all the am-

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ammunition was unloaded and removed by the Egyptian Army. As soon as he heard of this, Glubb Pasha sent another urgent message to the British G.H.Q. in Egypt, asking them to load another ship with ammunition for him, and again this was done, but before it could sail from Suez the United Nations' blockade had been enforced and the British were ordered to unload the ship and not to send any further ammunition to the Arab Legion. Trans-Jordan had to fight the war with only the meagre 'first' and 'second' line scales of ammunition, having no reserve to fall back upon. The only surplus they had over and above this was of some 303 ammunition which had been obtained from a British depot when it had been evacuated.

The Arab Liberation Army was reorganized, and deprived as it was of most of the Iraqis, who had left it to join their own national contingent, and shorn of many casual followers for whom the glamour of war had faded, it was reduced in numbers to about 2,000 all told. After some argument, it was placed completely under Lebanese command, and was supplied and maintained entirely from Lebanese bases.

Therefore, at a rough estimate, one can say that the total Arab regular armed forces in the field in Palestine were raised during the first truce from about 25,000 to perhaps about 45,000.

While the Arabs had been doing all this the Israelis had by no means been idle, and their emissaries scoured Europe and the United States for military supplies. The sea was now open to them, the so-called and much-boasted Egyptian naval blockade being of little or no effect, and once such war material was secured and on the water, there was not much to prevent its being safely landed in Israel, as the United Nations' observers were too few and far too busy to watch every inch of the coastline twenty-four hours a day.

The Israelis found Czechoslovakia, where the Communists had seized power in February 1947, particularly helpful, and the government-owned arms industry supplied large quantities of small arms, guns, bombs and ammunition. A regular air-lift from Prague to Aqir, near Rehovot, was organized.

## THE FIRST TRUCE

Flying Fortresses were smuggled out of America and Beau- fighters out of Britain, to be manned as soon as they reached Israel by experienced pilots who had served with the R.A.F., the Australian, South African and the American air forces. By the end of the first truce a small but formidable Israeli air force was in being, ready and waiting for a chance to hit back at the Arabs. Small ships and coastal craft had been acquired and the nucleus of an Israeli navy was soon apparent.

All this adds up to the fact that on July 9th Israel found herself for the first time reasonably well armed, having aircraft, armour, some artillery and ample small arms and ammunition. She had made more than good use of the breathing space that the first truce had afforded her.

During this truce Count Bernadotte, the mediator, worked hard trying to persuade both sides to agree to an armistice—that is to take matters one step further than the 'cease-fire' stage, but without success. His main idea was that Trans-Jordan and Palestine might form an economic union, in which there might be both an Arab and a Jewish state.

The proposals he outlined were, roughly, that Jerusalem and the Negev should be placed under the rule of Trans-Jordan, while western Galilee should go to the Jews. Haifa was to be a free port, and Lydda was to be a free airport. These proposals, which he put forward on June 28th and 29th, raised such a storm of Jewish protest that he hastily stated that they were, of course, only tentative. The Arab League did not take kindly to them either, as they gave all the plums to Trans-Jordan, already suspected by them of harbouring secret ambitions, and gave nothing to any of the other Arab countries that had intervened. The proposals were flatly rejected by both the Arabs and the Israelis.

On the 3rd, and again on July 5th, the mediator appealed to the combatants for a prolongation of the truce. The Israelis agreed, as extra time was obviously to their benefit, but the Arabs made no reply. Public opinion in many Arab states led to an overwhelming demand for the renewal of hostilities, the Arab politicians having told their peoples that the first truce

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had snatched victory from their jaws and had prevented the combined Arab armies from driving the Israelis into the sea.

But Arab military leaders are believed in many cases to have counselled a continuation of the truce, mainly on the score of shortage of ammunition and arms, as once the miniature arms race was begun, the Israelis began to receive supplies in increasing quantities, while the Arabs had yet to seek out their contacts and to set up and operate an efficient purchasing organization. However, there was some discussion between the various Arab prime ministers and Egypt, fearing a fall of government if the truce was prolonged after the intense newspaper campaign, voted for a renewal of hostilities and swayed the majority opinion of the Arab League states. So while perhaps there was hesitation and doubt in the higher circles behind the scenes, on the face of it the Arabs were ready and eager for another round.

## VII

### THE TEN DAYS' OFFENSIVE

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**T**he next phase of the war is usually referred to as the 'Ten Days' Offensive', and lasted from July 9th to 18th.

It was a short, sharp round, the main fighting taking place in the central sector, on the Syrian front and in Galilee.

In the south the Egyptians, straining against the leash and fortified by newspaper and other propaganda, beat the pistol and, before the official end of the truce, had begun to renew the fighting along the line they held from Isdud eastwards. On July 8th they mounted an attack on the Jewish settlement of Negba, which was the key-point of the Israeli defensive system. The Egyptians stuck to their usual pattern of a preliminary heavy artillery barrage to soften up the position, followed by an infantry assault, supported by armour on the flanks. But Negba had been reinforced with both men and arms, and good use had been made of the truce period to improve its defences, so this attack was held. Several of these assaults were made, but the Egyptians were unable to break through, and when they realized they were making no headway against the unyielding opposition the tempo of the offensive died down.

However, as soon as these attacks slackened off, the Israelis took the offensive, and one by one occupied a number of villages, improving their positions at the expense of the Egyptians, but priority of men and material was elsewhere, and their effort was necessarily limited. Even so, by July 18th they had pressed back the Egyptian line a little in the centre, although the main positions still held firm.

On July 15th the Egyptians, with a column of all arms and

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an estimated strength of about 1,400 men, launched an attack on the Jewish settlement of Berot Yezhak near Gaza, one of the several in the Negev which, although surrounded and completely engulfed by the Arab invasion, refused to surrender. It had a garrison of about 70 settlers, plus a platoon of the Israeli Army. After an opening artillery barrage, there was an infantry assault, but this was not pushed home with any degree of determination. When some casualties had been caused by the fire of the well-sited L.M.G's of the Israelis, the attack was called off, and the Egyptians contented themselves with bombarding Berot Yezhak with artillery fire from a distance, as well as firing occasional shots at it from their tanks.

Their other settlements in the Negev remained cut off, but none gave in, and the Israeli mobile force, which had been reinforced, continued to operate in the area between the main roads. This was about the sum total of the action in the south during this phase.

No longer untrained and without weapons, the Israeli Army was now a force to be reckoned with, having a unified command and a central planning staff. The only exceptions were the small units of the I.Z.L. and the Stern Group, which were still independent in the Jerusalem area. The Palmach, which was now almost a division in strength, although retaining its individuality for a little longer, was, of course, fully under command.

Accordingly, the Israeli high command planned four separate offensives. First, they were determined to strengthen the position of Tel Aviv and to force the road through to Jerusalem. Priority in men and material was given to this. Second, in the north, for prestige reasons, they proposed to drive the Syrians from Mishmar Hayarden just south of Lake Huleh. Third, they proposed to attack Kaukji's Arab Liberation Army, which was operating in the area of Nazareth and in the northern parts of Galilee. And lastly, they planned an offensive in the Old City of Jerusalem. Clear-cut and business-like directions were given to the various commanders.

On the other hand, there was little realistic thought amongst the Arab rank and file. The Arab countries, strongly backed by

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public opinion, were apparently eager for the fighting to be resumed, but still no central campaign was agreed upon. They each and all of them sincerely believed that they were superior to the Israelis from a military point of view, and that the truce had robbed them of victory. The Arab League attempted to show to the world a semblance of unity of purpose, but the member states were bent on pursuing their own private objectives and policy and seemed reluctant to help each other, lest some of the fruits of victory be snatched from them by their age-old rivals.

### THE CENTRAL FRONT

On the central front the Arabs held the line of villages from Ras El Ein, in the north, the source of the Jerusalem water supply, down through and including Yahudiah, Wilhelmenia, Beit Nabala, Kula, Lydda, Ramleh and Latrun. This was roughly the demarcation line which radiated from Ramallah, the main Arab supply base and headquarters. A protective belt of fortified villages and positions surrounded Tel Aviv, facing the Arabs. Between Beit Nabala and Lydda was the Jewish village of Ben Sheman, which had been in a state of siege for some time but still held out. Also, between Ramleh and Latrun, the road was blocked by the Israelis who held the villages of Gezer and Kubab.

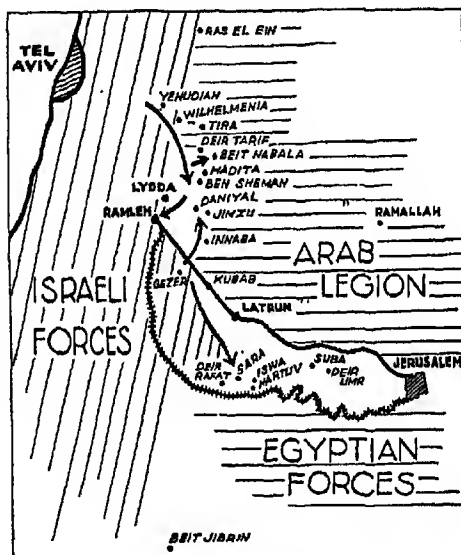
The Israelis in the 'pocket' of Ben Sheman were afforded good observation through binoculars of both Ramleh and Lydda and could see vehicles moving along the road to these two towns from the east; in view of this Glubb Pasha had offered to take it with his troops in the first phase of the open fighting. But apparently the mayors of the surrounding Arab villages protested on the grounds that they were on reasonably good terms with the inhabitants of Ben Sheman and also that any such attack would at once bring the attention of the whole Israeli Army down on them. Accordingly, it had been left alone so far.

Colonel Alon's Palmach brigade, which had been transferred



## THE TEN DAYS' OFFENSIVE

to this front, was detailed to strengthen the ring around the provisional capital and to force a 'corridor' through to Jerusalem. By now the Palmach had been given its share of conscripts, and had a strength of over 6,000 all told. It was divided into three columns, which were in fact 'brigades', and in effect the Palmach was a small division. Priority had been given to this operation, and Alon was supplied with jeeps, half-tracks,



Central Front. 9th to 18th July, 1948

armoured cars and some light field artillery. In addition, some air support was available.

The Israelis believed that Latrun, Ramleh and Lydda were strongly held by Arab Legion troops, and that a determined effort would be necessary to reduce these points. Accordingly, Colonel Alon planned to use two 'brigades' in the initial phase, in which his aim was first of all to isolate the Lydda-Ramleh position before assaulting it. He then proposed to turn the

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whole weight of his force on Latrun, which he intended to deal with in a similar manner.

Initially, the Arab Legion had manned only Latrun and had, of course, been the troops responsible for beating off the previous Israeli assaults in which so many lives had been lost. Rāmleh and Lydda had been held in the first instance by Arab irregulars and armed locals. But towards the end of the first round of the open fighting Glubb Pasha had sent forward some small detachments of his men to these two towns—about a hundred all told, with a few armoured cars—thinking that by so doing Trans-Jordan would be in a much stronger position for bargaining should the first truce be prolonged and diplomatic negotiations develop.

However, during the truce, a rift had appeared in the Arab League; the Mufti had begun to organize moves against his old enemy, King Abdullah, and as there was a possibility of unrest in Trans-Jordan a proportion of the Arab Legion had to be withdrawn. On the resumption of hostilities, on July 9th, General Glubb Pasha was left with only about 4,000 men or so to hold the line from Jerusalem to Lydda, which was thirty-odd miles in length.

The Lydda-Rāmleh position projected dangerously into Israeli-held territory, pointing like an arrow at Tel Aviv, the heart of the new Jewish state, and was very vulnerable to being cut off by any encircling movement, so Glubb Pasha withdrew troops from it, and made Beit Nabala the centre of a local defensive system in that area, leaving the irregulars and such local inhabitants as were armed to hold the positions, promising them help and the support of his armoured cars should they become hard pressed. At Latrun, he still retained his men in the strong positions around the police post and the monastery.

The Israeli offensive started on the night of the 9th, with deep penetration at several points. Of the two brigades used, one started from near Tel Aviv, striking south-west, and the other from Gezer, which struck northwards. These two brigades were to join forces and then attack first Lydda and then Rāmleh.

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The northern brigade took the village of Yahudiya on the 10th, after some fighting, and this was followed by the fall of Wilhelmenia. Both were seized by flanking movements. The villages of Rantis, Tira and Deir Tarif fell to similar tactics. Constant attacks by day and night, with concentrations of mortar fire, plus some aircraft bombardment, broke down the Arab resistance. Between Beit Nabala, where an armoured car detachment of the Arab Legion stiffened the defences, and Deir Tarif, the Arabs fought back desperately in an effort to reopen the road to Lydda, using armoured cars in their counter-attacks. Several places changed hands more than once, but Beit Nabala held out doggedly, so the Israelis pushed on to Hadita.

Meanwhile the southern brigade, coming northwards from Gezer, crossed the Jerusalem road and by the morning of the 10th had taken the Arab villages of Innaba, Jimza and Daniyal. This brigade then continued northward to relieve Ben Sheman, and by nightfall on that day had joined the northern brigade at Hadita. Thus the Lydda-Ramleh position was completely encircled, and cut off both from its base at Ramallah and from communication with Latrun.

Already, on July 10th, Israeli armoured vehicles had broken through part of the defence and had penetrated a short way into the town of Lydda, but had been unable to make good their occupation of the ground they had taken. On the 11th an assault was put in by the two combined brigades. The countryside was similar to rolling downland, ideal for movement of vehicles and infantry, while the town was surrounded by an anti-tank ditch. This was breached and the attack made a good start but it was eventually held up by a garrison of about 150 Arabs in the police post, which being in a commanding position and having extremely good fields of fire, brought the assault to a stop.

Orders to surrender brought no answer, while the townspeople and the various detachments of irregulars and armed inhabitants sat tight everywhere, awaiting the expected relief by the Arab Legion. During the afternoon, a few armoured cars of the Arab Legion intervened in the battle, scattering

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some Israeli infantry units, and causing the attackers to regroup and to change some of their positions. But when they saw the weight of men and material ranged against Lydda, after doing what damage they could, these armoured cars withdrew.

During the night the Arab garrison withdrew from the police post, and the next morning, the 12th, Lydda surrendered and the Israelis marched in and took over. Ramleh, which was really part of the same defended locality, was left open and was soon occupied. There was some fighting around the airport, where a detachment of irregulars made a stand, but that was in Israeli hands by midday.

The majority of the 60,000 Arabs in Lydda and Ramleh fled for safety towards Ramallah.

Israeli vans with loudspeakers drove through the streets ordering all the inhabitants to evacuate immediately, and such as were reluctant to leave were forcibly ejected from their homes by the triumphant Israelis whose policy was now openly one of clearing out all the Arab civil population before them. As the bulk of them withdrew over the open country on a blazing hot day, some Israeli mortars opened up to help them on their way and it is reported that several women and children died of heat and exhaustion during this exodus.

From the surrounding villages and hamlets, during the next two or three days, all the inhabitants were uprooted and set off on the road to Ramallah.

Next, Colonel Alon turned his attention to Beit Nabala, which stoutly resisted his attacks at first, but it fell to him on the 13th. The victory was rather an empty one, as the Arab Legion there was only a small detachment and had been withdrawn at the last moment; realizing the man-power problem of Glubb, Alon had counted on capturing most of the defenders. This was as far as Colonel Alon went in this direction, and now he paused and turned southward again to Latrun.

Latrun was still garrisoned by the Arab Legion, and again one of the Israeli Palmach brigades began encircling tactics around the position. Supporting this move were five tanks which riddled the police post with shot, and an extraordinary duel

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developed between these tanks and the solitary Arab Legion gun on the roof. All the crew of this gun were killed but fresh men replaced them in the effort to keep it firing, and as quickly as a casualty occurred a volunteer rushed to take his place. Ultimately, the five tanks were disabled one by one but the gun on the police post roof continued in action. Slowly, Colonel Alon's men forced their way around, village by village, against strong Arab resistance, but time was against them and they had not quite completed the movement when the second truce came into effect on July 18th. It was a very near thing, and the Israelis had got to within 300 yards of the road from Latrun to Ramallah at one point, but things were becoming difficult and the operation was beginning to get out of control. Even had the Israelis succeeded in reaching the road they would certainly have had to pause to reorganize before carrying on. This was the hardest thing the Palmach had hit and they were more hurt than their commanders cared to admit.

For this operation Colonel Alon had in effect a division under his command, and had to deal with the larger problems of control, communication and administration, as well as planning and directing the fighting. The tactics he adopted, those of encirclement, were sound, and showed that the Israelis had learnt from their earlier failures. His planning was good, and he progressed step by step, keeping one foot on the ground. For the first time the Israeli troops had sufficient arms and transport, and were overwhelmingly in the majority.

The second part of the plan, the encirclement of Latrun, was going fairly well but had already begun to run down when all movement was brought to an abrupt halt by the advent of the second truce. The only possible criticism was that perhaps the sweep around Latrun was rather narrow, and a wider movement might have been more successful. Also, only one of the brigades was used, the Palmach having become rather dispersed by this time, when perhaps the concentration of a little more force at the right spot might have yielded quicker results. Control in the field towards the end was not all it might have been.

But whether Glubb Pasha would have allowed this move-

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ment to be continued is another matter. Arab Legion reinforcements were being rushed from Jerusalem towards Latrun, so it may be fair to assume that he was intending to launch some form of counter-attack. This, had it happened, would have been a real trial of strength. Even so, the Palmach view was that the Arab Legion soldier was the best there was on the Arab side, but they were of the opinion that in this last fighting they had got the measure of him, and that in a prolonged battle, in which determination, stubbornness and doggedness were required, they would emerge the victors. Generally, the chief Israeli disappointment was the fact that so few of the Arab Legion were captured, but Glubb Pasha realized to the full the value of his soldiers and had not thoughtlessly exposed them to the risk of being made prisoners.

On the other hand, the tails of Glubb Pasha's soldiers were well up, their morale was high and they too were firmly convinced that they had the measure of the Israeli fighting man.

From a technical point of view, the novel feature of this fighting was the large-scale use of jeeps by the Israelis, as both weapon and personnel carriers in the forward areas, often under fire. There seems to be no limit to the load a jeep can carry in an emergency, and the Palmach soon recognized this, fully exploiting this valuable vehicle. Another feature was the deep penetration by night between enemy villages and posts. The Palmach made good use of the hours of darkness, both fighting and movement continuing on throughout the night.

Colonel Alon was detailed to perform yet another task. The Egyptian troops from the Bethlehem area had infiltrated northwards over the Jerusalem-Ramleh railway line, and were encroaching towards the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road where they would make contact with the Arab Legion troops just north of it. This task was to push back the Egyptians and to widen the existing gap between the two Arab armies.

As soon as Lydda and Ramleh fell, on July 12th, Colonel Alon diverted his third brigade to this area between the road and the railway, and on the 13th the Egyptian-held village of Sara was captured. The next day Suba was taken, and Deir

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Umr followed a day or so later. The Jewish settlement of Hartuv was recovered and the Egyptians evacuated the nearby police post. On the morning of the 18th, Iswa and Deir Rafat fell to them. During these few days, all along this line, the Egyptian forces were pressed backwards, and by July 19th the whole of the area between the railway line and the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road was held by the Israelis. Also, south of the railway, they had managed to clear the territory as far south as Beit Jibrin. From these areas the Arab inhabitants were ejected, mainly southwards.

The troops operating (the Palmach) were split up into small columns and detachments so as to be able to infiltrate through the hills to get at the enemy, and many had to act independently. The Egyptians had fortified the villages but after the initial skirmish they soon evacuated. Night marches and encircling movements were widely used. The policy of uprooting the Arab population before them was fully developed.

## THE SYRIAN FRONT

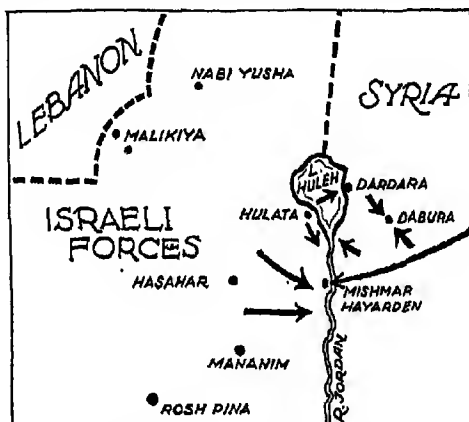
On this front, during the first truce, both the Israelis and the Syrians had been digging-in and preparing for the resumption of hostilities. The Syrian bridgehead at Mishmar Hayarden was heavily fortified and the troops there increased and reorganized into two brigades, each containing three small battalions of infantry, instead of two, as formerly, with a fair proportion of artillery and armour in support. In all, there were about 2,500 men in and around the bridgehead position. Here, the Arabs had the advantage that the road from Rosh Pina, northwards to the Jewish settlements, was under shell fire from the Syrians in the east and from the Lebanese from the west. The Israelis anticipated that the Syrians would launch an attack, with the object of linking up with both Kaukji, in central Galilee, and the Lebanese, at Malikiya.

The Israeli higher command decided to mount an offensive operation, to be called 'Barosh', which was to drive the invaders back into Syria. Field battalions were mobilized, rein-

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forcements were sent, and a proportion of armoured vehicles, half-tracks, some light artillery and mortars were allotted. Western Galilee was denuded of men and material to support this effort. The plan was that the Israeli force, which numbered roughly about just under 2,000, was to be divided up into four columns, each with a separate task and objective.

The first column was to cross Lake Huleh, from Hulata to Dardara (both Israeli-held) and from there, first take the heights around Dabura (Syrian-held) and then push on and cut



Syrian Fighting. 9th to 18th July, 1948

the road from Mishmar Hayarden to the Syrian base to the east. The second column was to move from Hulata southwards along the shores of the lake to the River Jordan, where it was about a hundred yards wide, just south of the lake itself, bridge and cross it. The column was then to advance and cut the same road from Mishmar Hayarden eastwards, a little to the west of where the first column was due to cut it.

The third column was to move forward to some high ground covering the Syrian bridgehead, to the west of it, and to open up a holding-attack to cover the river crossing of the second column. The fourth column was to act in conjunction with the



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third column, and was to take up a position just a little to the south, also covering the Syrian positions. So much for the plan.

Operation 'Barosh' was put into motion as soon as it got dark on July 9th. The first Israeli column successfully crossed Lake Huleh during the night, but in its advance towards the heights of Dabura surprise was lost and fire was opened by the Syrian artillery. However, they succeeded in making good their occupation of these heights, but instead of then pushing straight on to complete their task, which was to cut the road to the south, this column stayed where it was. No satisfactory reason has been put forward for this, for although surprise had been lost, few casualties had been suffered and little opposition met with.

The second columns, starting from Hulata, marched along the shore of the lake and reached the River Jordan at the place where it was planned to cross. Here the Israeli troubles began. The plan was to build a sort of pontoon-type bridge with materials they had carried with them, but they soon realized that someone had miscalculated, and there were insufficient boats to do the job. At this point, their presence was discovered by the Syrians, who subjected them to fairly heavy small arms fire, which, as many of the Israeli troops had not been in action before, caused confusion. However, the project was proceeded with, and a single bridge was eventually completed over the River Jordan, but by daylight only a very small number of troops had crossed. These remained where they were, on the far bank, and the original object of the column, which was to cut the road to the south-east, was not fulfilled.

The third and fourth columns got into the positions to which they had been detailed to go, and opened fire upon the bridge-head positions, but there was little co-ordination, and the Israeli fire did hardly any damage to the well-constructed Syrian defences.

With the coming of daylight on July 10th the Syrians began their counter-attack, and their artillery bombarded the positions which the third and fourth columns were in; there were numerous casualties as the Israelis had not been able to dig

## THE TEN DAYS' OFFENSIVE

themselves into the barren, rocky ground. Their few light artillery pieces were out-ranged by the Syrian guns. Aircraft bombed and strafed Israeli concentrations and the roads leading to them.

After this preliminary barrage, the Syrians advanced with tanks supporting the infantry. The artillery programme was well timed and controlled, and the curtain of fire lifted before the advancing troops. An infantry battalion was put against each of the positions held by the third and fourth columns, and after some desperate fighting the Israelis were forced off this high ground, only managing to retain one small foothold.

About the same time the other Syrian brigade attacked the Israeli second column, the one which had attempted to bridge the River Jordan. Again, it was a soundly executed movement and was supported by artillery. The small party which had crossed over to the east side of the Jordan suffered very heavy casualties and had to retreat, leaving some wounded and much equipment behind. Crossing the river, the Syrians pressed hard on the heels of the Israelis, threatening Hulata. However, reinforcements were rushed up in time, and a stand was made on the shore of the lake, a little to the south of that village, where the Syrian advance was held. But it was a close shave.

On the next day, the 11th, the Syrians turned their attention to the first column, which was still stuck on the heights of Dabura. A set-piece assault, with the usual preliminary artillery barrage, followed by the infantry advancing, closely supported by the armour, was put in, but this time the Israelis were in a better position, with more cover, and were able to beat the assault off. Several more attempts were made during the day, but although they suffered some casualties, the Israelis retained their positions, and in the evening the Syrian troops withdrew.

After this a stalemate set in around Mishmar Hayarden, and for the next seven days, there was fighting very reminiscent of that on the western front in the First World War, in which much blood was spilt and much ammunition expended, but little territory gained. By July 18th, the end of this phase of the

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war, the Syrians were still firmly in possession of their bridge-head at Mishmar Hayarden, but it was encircled by Israeli positions, in and before Hulata, Hasahar and Mananim.

Reviewing this fighting: the Israelis had initiated the offensive, but it had not gone well for them and they had been repulsed with heavy casualties, retaining Dabura but having to give ground below Hulata. On the other hand, the Syrians were quick off the mark, with their counter-attacks, which showed a surprising degree of co-ordination of all arms, and had some success, but were finally held just south of Hulata and at Dabura.

From the Israeli point of view, several features were open to criticism. In the first place the division of the force into four columns, each of which was given a separate task, was not a wise move, as it meant that the whole was committed, and that there was no reserve available to deal with anything that might crop up, or to exploit any success. The Israeli commander was fighting with both feet off the ground. Had he had something up his sleeve he might have been able to turn the unfavourable situation into a more favourable one. The commander who loses his reserve loses control of the battle.

The general plan of a holding attack with a flanking movement, especially from the least expected side, was good, but it is not clear why both the first and the second columns should be given almost identical tasks. Also, the first column was launched out into the blue, with no support. The positions selected for the third and the fourth columns were badly chosen, as the ground, which was rocky and barren, did not allow the troops to dig in, thus exposing them to enemy artillery fire.

The attempt at bridging the River Jordan was good in theory, but not enough attention was paid to detail, and general lack of administrative experience gravely handicapped its chances of success, which mainly depended upon speed. There was lack of materials, a bottle-neck was caused, which did not have sufficient local protection, and such troops as did eventually get across did not have adequate fire support. But, to be fair, such an operation at night would have tested seasoned troops and experienced staffs.

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The whole plan of action against the Syrians in this area seemed to be over-ambitious, and it gave the impression that the Israelis expected their enemy to fall back as soon as his flanks were threatened, as the irregular Arabs had done in so many instances. The signs of sound tactical planning which had begun to be evident in many of the Israeli operations was lacking here and generally there seemed to be an absence of central control. The Israelis had begun to recover themselves by the 15th and the 16th, and on the 18th were in the process of mounting another attack. But time was too short for them to recoup their reputation.

On behalf of the Syrians, much can be said. They were of course stronger and perhaps a little better armed. But their counter-attacks had been prompt, well-timed and well-controlled. There was also good co-ordination between the different arms, which resulted in heavy Israeli casualties. In the seven days of 'stalemate' fighting, they acquitted themselves with credit, and they were about to launch an assault on Dabura when the second truce stopped all movement. Time had been against them as well.

## THE FIGHTING IN GALILEE

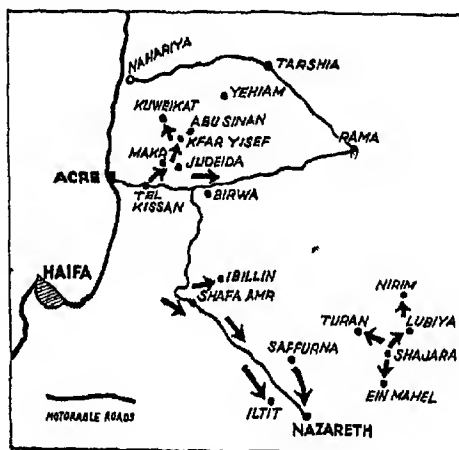
In central Galilee, Kaukji was still in command of the Arab Liberation Army, which had been reorganized and reduced in strength to about 2,000. It was now under Lebanese command and was supplied and controlled from that country. Kaukji had been given some field artillery, some armoured and other vehicles. He had set up his headquarters in Nazareth, and he dominated the mountainous area around.

The Israelis held a narrow strip, or 'corridor', through the Vale of Esdraelon, from Haifa to Beisan. They also occupied the coastal plain from Acre northwards, called the Vale of Zebulon, which was threatened by the Arabs in the overlooking hills.

It was decided by the Israeli high command that Nazareth must be taken, and that the Vale of Zebulon must be made

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safe, and with these objects in view Operation 'Dekel' was launched. Colonel Carmel, the 'Victor of Haifa', was in command of this and his force consisted mainly of the 'Anglo-Saxon Brigade', which had just arrived from the Latrun sector, and which consisted of a fairly experienced battalion and a newly formed one, together with some units of the field army that had been mobilized. He was given some armoured cars, half-tracks, jeeps, anti-tank guns and mortars, and had a reasonable supply of ammunition available.



Galilee. Operation 'Dekel'. 9th to 18th July, 1948

Colonel Carmel decided to deal with the threat to the coastal strip first, and this he did in four separate moves, or 'steps', keeping one foot on the ground all the time. The first step he made was to attack a dominating hill, called Tel Kissan, which was only two and a half miles from the Acre-Haifa road. He moved on the night of July 9th, and by a flank march and the clever use of infantry, backed by artillery, he assaulted the hill position from the rear. The surprise was complete and his success immediate.

This done, he turned his brigade northwards, and in turn

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took the villages of Makr, Judeida, Abu Sinan, Kfar Yisef and Kuweikat, pushing the Arabs back as he did so, thus making the Plain of Zebulon more secure.

Making his third step, he turned his force eastward along the Birwa-Rama road. Here, he did not meet with the same complete success, as the Arabs resisted fiercely, and several villages and vantage points changed hands a number of times. The Israelis managed to penetrate a little way along this road, and were then held up. Correctly, Colonel Carmel did not reinforce failure, but contained the enemy by continuous patrols and raids, which tied down the Arabs in that area.

He then detached one battalion to relieve the isolated Israeli village of Yehiam, which was situated just south of the Nahariya-Tarshia road. This was done successfully, and the Arabs were pushed back into the hills. All this was accomplished in the first three days of the fighting.

Pausing briefly to regroup, Colonel Carmel then turned his brigade towards Nazareth, which was his main task. His plan was to make a diversion by attacking Iltit, which was to the east of Nazareth, while his main striking force, a lorry-borne battalion, assaulted from the north via Saffurna. The defences of Nazareth were strongest on the south, which was closest to the Israeli 'corridor', and from which direction it was assumed by Kaukji any enemy attack was the most likely to come.

The offensive was opened on July 13th by a night attack on the Arab strongpoint of Shafa Amr, which was taken after some fighting, and the road south-east to Nazareth lay open. On the next day the village of Ibillin, just to the north of Shafa Amr, was taken. The column detailed to make the diversionary attack on Iltit was held up for a time, the country being ideal for defence and delaying actions, which the Arabs made full use of, and it seemed as though the fighting might bog down in this sector.

However, on the 16th, after being ambushed badly and losing some of his armoured cars, Colonel Carmel quickly recovered and forced his way into Saffurna, taking the town about midday. The Israeli troops were very tired by this time but,

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realizing the situation, the commander roused them to make the final spurt that day to Nazareth, which was six miles away. The Israelis responded well and moved forward, bumping into Kaukji's men about three miles outside the town, where, in a sharp engagement, seven Arab armoured cars were knocked out, causing the Arabs, fighting a delaying action, to retire into Nazareth. In following closely, the Israelis suffered some casualties in the process, but speed was the essential element.

Again, on the outskirts of the town, there was more fighting, but the Israelis managed to break through the barriers that had been erected against them, and the majority of the Arab troops then retired into three fortified positions, a monastery, an orphanage building and the police post. These posts were at once subjected to artillery shelling, as well as small arms fire from all angles. One by one these points were taken, some of the Arabs surrendering and some escaping into the town itself, and by nightfall most of Nazareth was in Israeli possession. Kaukji and his staff lay hidden all night, contemplating a counter-attack. But his plans came to nothing, and just before dawn he and numbers of his men slipped away northwards over the hills.

As soon as he had moved in sufficient troops to garrison the town, Colonel Carmel moved out northwards with his striking force, to deal with the several Arab counter-attacks that were being put in against his men all along the line. His force fanned out as it moved, and in the remaining two days of the fighting he took most of the Arab villages dominating the Birwa-Rama road, and also those along the road from Shafa Amr to Birwa. When the second truce came into effect he had begun to advance along the road towards Tarshia.

There can be nothing but praise for Colonel Carmel's conduct of these operations, which showed good tactical appreciation and careful thought. Operation 'Dekel' was well-planned and well-executed: speed, surprise and mobility being the key-notes. Full use was made of the hours of darkness for both movement and fighting. Tel Kissan, taken from the rear by night, was an example.

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Carmel took one step at a time, ensuring that he had sufficient reserve to be able to reinforce a success, to extricate some of his force if necessary, or to bolster up as required. When he ran into heavy opposition along the road to Rama he did not let himself get involved in a battle which would absorb men and arms but left a covering force to hold the enemy. In this he resolutely stuck to an important principle of war, that of maintaining the aim. His aim was to capture Nazareth and not to fritter away his strength and resources fighting in the hills. The strain upon his troops and vehicles was very great, as he pushed them to the utmost, and by the 18th they had just about reached their limit.

The Arab irregulars fought fairly well. Most of the villages had been fortified and the abundant local stone was put to good use in making strong defensive posts and sheltered lines of communication. However, Kaukji, the guerrilla, was unskilful with the apparatus of modern warfare and did not seem to quite know how to make use of his artillery, armoured vehicles and transport. And neither in strategy nor in tactics was he equal to Colonel Carmel.

Mention must be made, too, of the action that took place during this phase around the Israeli village of Shajara. It was surrounded on three sides by the Arab-held villages of Lubiya, Kfar Kana, Turan and Ein Mahel, and its precarious supply route from the south was under fire. During the first truce Shajara, remembered for its spirited 'offensive-defence' in the first phase of the fighting, had been reinforced and an anti-tank ditch had been dug round it. But there was a distinct lack of effort in constructing defensive positions and many elementary precautions seem to have been neglected.

On July 9th Kaukji opened his limited offensive by attacking Shajara, and it was only by a narrow margin that the defenders managed to beat this assault off. Had they continued to press the attack the Arabs would have overrun the place, but when it did not quickly and easily fall the momentum slowed down, giving the Israelis a breathing space. During that afternoon the men of Shajara, showing the same lively spirit, made



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a small counter-attack in which they were able to drive the Arabs from two small hills which overlooked the villages.

In the evening the Arabs resumed the assault, and again the next morning, but when these were not successful their efforts slackened off and they contented themselves with besieging the village. On the 15th the defenders began a local offensive and by the morning of the 16th the Arabs had given a little ground. Soon they were being pushed back more quickly, and by evening most of them faded away. The taking of Nazareth, of course, had much to do with this.

On the 17th this Israeli offensive picked up and got under way and a small force moved out from Shajara towards Lubiya. By evening a village *en route* had been stormed and taken and Lubiya had been shelled. The next day, the last of this phase, this force really got into its stride, taking first of all Turan and then Lubiya, and completed the mopping up along the road to Tiberias. The Arabs offered less and less resistance. On the 19th, the day after the second truce came into effect, the Israelis continued on, part of them entering Nirim in the north while another detachment entered Ein Mahel in the south.

Shajara was a rare case of Israeli neglect to take great care in constructing and fortifying their positions; this very nearly resulted in the loss of the village and it was only saved by lack of Arab determination and energy. However, the defenders soon recovered, and as soon as they could they mounted an offensive of their own which had some success, although, from the Arab point of view, by the time it had got under way most of Kaukji's men had been withdrawn from that area to take part in the battle for Nazareth.

## JERUSALEM

In and around Jerusalem, in this phase, there was comparatively little activity. Glubb Pasha began an offensive, which had the object of generally improving his position, and to provide a number of suitable jumping-off points for future attacks.

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This started well and a little ground was gained in the first few days, the desert Arab soldiers showing up surprisingly well in the house-to-house fighting. But as the battle around Latrun opened, all men of the Arab Legion that could be spared were rushed to that area from Jerusalem with the result that the offensive soon came to a halt.

On the other side, the Israeli high command planned an attack, and Colonel Shaltiel, the commander, publicly declared that he only needed four days to take the Old City, but he was a long time getting everything ready. He obviously underrated the speed at which the United Nations' Organization was capable of working, and when at last he did realize how short time was, he was hastily rushed into taking action, egged on by the vociferous extremist organizations.

This Israeli offensive was called Operation 'Kedem', meaning 'antiquity', as it took place on the 2,500th anniversary of the breaching of the Walls of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian army. This was begun on July 17th and was preceded by a heavy mortar barrage and some artillery fire. The attack was repulsed and the Israelis suffered fairly heavy casualties. Before they had time to regroup to attack again, the second truce was upon them. Shaltiel was bitterly reproached for his dilatoriness in beginning the operation, but to be fair, he did not, like so many others, anticipate that the period of fighting would be limited to only ten days, and he wanted to have everything ready before he launched his assault on the Old City, which was a tough nut to crack.

He also had difficulty in controlling the still independent I.Z.L. and Stern Group, who insisted on the objective being, for prestige reasons, the Old City. Had he been able to have had more time, and to follow his own inclination as a soldier, he would probably have attacked some of the thinly-held Arab Legion localities in the Sheikh Jarra district, or as a preliminary he would first of all have made an effort to surround the Old City as Colonel Alon was doing at Latrun, before attacking it directly. Either of these courses would have been a far wiser tactical move, and would probably have produced better results.

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So generally, in the Jerusalem area, throughout this phase, apart from Operation 'Kedem' which started so very late and the Arab Legion offensive which never really got going, action was mainly confined to shelling, which was carried out continuously by both sides, with small skirmishes and patrol actions. As a matter of interest, New Jerusalem experienced its first air raid on the 16th, but it had little effect, amid the accustomed mortar and artillery barrages.

Gesher, to the north, where previously some Arab Legion troops were involved, was quiet, except for some shelling and patrol activity, Iraqis having moved into their area.

A little farther north still was Ein Gev, the Israeli settlement on the east shore of Lake Tiberias, which had been in a state of constant siege since the beginning of the war. It had been shelled practically continuously by the Syrians, who did not, however, venture to attack it directly, but in fairness to them it must be said that the attention of their main effort was directed to their bridgehead at Mishmar Hayarden, and they too had little to spare for such minor asides. On July 17th, and again on the 18th, the defenders of Ein Gev took the offensive and managed to capture one or two of the heights overlooking the settlement, which gave them some relief from the everlasting Arab artillery bombardment.

Summarizing the fighting during the 'Ten Days' Offensive': it can be said that the Israelis had been on the offensive all the time, while the Arabs had been on the defensive—a reversal of the situation which was in being during the fighting in May and June. Without a doubt, this round went to the Israelis.

In the south the Egyptian force was fairly passive and, apart from one or two attempts to mount attacks, there was little activity on their part. They had no successes to record and local Israeli pressure actually took some ground from them.

The main fighting was on the central front, around Ramleh, Lydda and Latrun. In three days the Palmach, under Colonel Alon, had taken Ramleh, Lydda and many of the adjacent villages, thus thickening and strengthening the defensive belt

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that encircled Tel Aviv. Latrun held out, but to do so Arab Legion reinforcements had to be diverted from Jerusalem, which resulted in a consequent slackening off of Arab pressure there. In the Jerusalem area itself the situation had been generally quiet. Colonel Shaltiel's offensive was delayed and Glubb Pasha was unable to mount his properly.

In Galilee, Colonel Carmel had conducted a brilliant campaign against Kaukji, and in doing so he made the Plain of Zebulun secure and captured Nazareth, causing the Arab guerrilla leader to flee northwards. Only in the Mishmar Hayarden area had the Israelis suffered a 'bloody nose'. There, the Syrians had not been driven back over the frontier as had been hoped, but on the contrary had gained a little territory at the expense of the Israelis.

The benefit of a central, unified command, with a general staff, to plan and direct the fighting, was amply demonstrated to the Israelis; and their co-operation of all arms, including the air force, resulted in good dividends being paid all round. This helped in overcoming many of the administrative problems involved in handling large bodies of troops.

In most instances their planning was good and well thought out. Better tactics were adopted and there were no more thoughtless frontal attacks. All in all, the new Israeli National Army had every reason to be proud of itself, its chief disappointment being that so few Arab Legion prisoners had been captured.

At the end of this phase the Israeli opinion of the Arab Legion seemed to be that as individuals they were far superior to any of the soldiers of the other Arab armies, and their officers were certainly better trained, but it was considered that the majority of the men, especially the older soldiers, were still imbued with a 'police force' mentality, which would be a severe handicap in a set-piece battle. The Israelis realized that Glubb Pasha had no reserve of trained men to call upon, nor was such man-power as he had available easily or quickly trainable, and that he could not continue indefinitely to engage in prolonged actions against equal, or superior, numbers. For these reasons

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the Israeli high command made a final effort to engage the Arab Legion in battle, concentrating the Palmach, their best troops, in overwhelming strength, against it. On the other hand, the Arab Legion boasted that the Israelis had not succeeded in taking a single house or yard of territory from them, insisting that it was never their intention to hold Ramleh and Lydda, and that in the case of Beit Nabala all they had there was a normal protective screen which any conventional army throws out in front of it. To illustrate their superiority and success in battle Glubb Pasha claims that during the fighting his men captured 783 Israeli soldiers while only three wounded men of the Arab Legion were taken prisoner.

Finally, apart from the close ground support given to the armies in action on both sides, there was some strategic air activity, cities and towns both in Israel and in the adjoining Arab states, including Cairo and Damascus, suffering air raids. At sea, the infant Israeli navy was quickly making itself felt, and on one occasion a flotilla emerged and bombarded Tyre in the Lebanon.

## VIII

# THE SECOND TRUCE

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**T**he second truce came into effect at 5.30 p.m. (local time) on July 18th and was in fact merely a 'cease-fire', the combatants simply staying exactly where they were, remaining alert, and hopefully fingering their triggers, ready to resume hostilities immediately. The United Nations and the mediator, Count Bernadotte, had worked with unexpected and surprising speed, and it had come suddenly, catching both the Arabs and the Israelis with their fists poised in mid-air.

It was an uneasy truce, punctuated by numerous incidents, firing with small arms and occasional shelling, especially in the Jerusalem area. There were raids and stealthy encroachments on each other's territory. The soldiers on both sides, with the exception perhaps of the Egyptians in the south who were more or less satisfied with the amount of territory they had occupied—which looked imposing on the map and appeared to some extent public opinion at home—accepted it reluctantly. None thought it was the end, but merely a breather to enable them to gather strength for another round.

On July 15th the Security Council of the United Nations had passed a resolution ordering the governments and authorities to issue 'cease-fire' orders to their forces, to take effect at a time to be determined by Count Bernadotte, but in any case not later than three days from the date the resolution was passed. Considerable pressure was put on all the belligerents to accept this truce, which was not negotiated but was ordered, and they were left in no doubt that severe and rigid economic sanctions would be enforced against any who did not comply. The truce

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was to be of indefinite duration. Obviously, the mediator was hoping that he would be able to prolong it into an armistice agreement, from which a lasting solution could be found.

The Israeli Government, headed by Ben Gurion, accepted this truce, although there was considerable opposition to his doing so from the Israeli military commanders and advisers, who by now having felt the power of the new Israeli Army they had under their hand, realized the possibilities that were open to them. They also realized the Arabs' weaknesses, and they strongly urged that they should be allowed to fight on until total victory was achieved.

Neither, on the other hand, were the Arabs unanimous in their acceptance of it. Two Arab states, Iraq and Syria, voted against complying with the order, but the majority agreed, although they asked that the truce should be of a specified duration, as indefinite prolongation was to their detriment and to the benefit of the Israelis. But nothing was done about this suggestion, and the truce came into effect as ordered fairly well on time, although there were troop movements and some fighting in parts of the various fronts for some hours afterwards.

To supervise the truce Count Bernadotte was given an enlarged staff, which consisted of 10 Swedish officers and 300 American, French and Belgian officers, together with sufficient technical personnel to man his 18 aircraft, 4 ships, his large fleet of vehicles and the many radio sets and other equipment. His observers were widely distributed, being stationed at Haifa, Aqir, Nathanyia, Ramat David, Tiberias, Jerusalem, Hebron, Nablus and Ramallah, as well as at Beirut, Damascus, Amman, Akaba, Baghdad, Basra, Alexandria, Cairo, El Arish and Port Said. The truce commission quickly got on with the job of mapping out the 'demarcation line' between the opposing sides, which was about 400 kilos in length, while the mediator vainly tried to control the numerous incidents that constantly flared up.

The situation in Jerusalem was not good and gave particular cause for concern. Passions were aroused on both sides, and when the truce came into effect the firing and shelling merely

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died down a little and it was only with great difficulty and extreme patience on the part of Count Bernadotte that open hostilities did not actively break out again. The mediator managed, with much effort, to establish a neutral zone, but a clear demarcation line was more than either he or his staff could accomplish.

The Israelis in the New City had only a slender thread of communication with Tel Aviv and the coast, by way of the improvised 'Burma Road', and the Arabs did all they could to prevent supplies and water from reaching them. On August 12th the pumping station at Latrun was blown up and, as far as it lay in the Arabs' power to do so, the water supply to Jerusalem was cut off. However, this was of doubtful value, as the Arabs in the Jerusalem area were then forced to rely solely on the meagre supplies in their water cisterns and wells, while by this time the Israelis had got their alternative water-pipe line working.

On July 26th the Israeli Government declared the New City of Jerusalem to be 'Israeli-occupied territory', and appointed a military governor. The I.Z.L., who were still independent in this area, announced on August 8th that they would obey the orders of the newly-appointed military governor but that they objected to the appointment in principle.

From the first the mediator spared no effort and gave every attention to Jerusalem, where the frequent breaches of the truce amounted at times very nearly to open warfare but he had little success, and he was eventually forced to report to the United Nations that there was small chance of implementing their resolution in the Holy City unless he was backed by a strong United Nations' armed force. All nations were willing to offer advice and criticism, but none—not even America, who had so much to say on the matter—was prepared to send soldiers to enforce unpopular United Nations' decisions. Count Bernadotte demanded that the immigration of all males of military age should cease by September 2nd, but again he had no real means of enforcing such an order, which to the Israelis accentuated his ineffectiveness.



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Immediately the fighting stopped all parties became active in the political field and started wrangling amongst themselves, while the mediator worked desperately to find a solution. His was a thankless task and he was received coolly by both the Jews and the Arabs, but he persevered. On September 16th he finished his report on his proposals, which were roughly similar to those he had put forward so tentatively in July. Basically, his plan was that the Negev was to go to the Arabs and that Lydda and Ramleh were to be returned to Trans-Jordan, while in return the Israelis were to get the whole of Galilee. Jerusalem was to be a *corpus separatum* under the care of the United Nations, Haifa was to be a free port, and Lydda was to be a free airport. Finally, he insisted that all the Arab refugees were to be allowed to return to their homes or, alternatively, were to be compensated.

The Arab League was not particularly pleased with these proposals, as all the spoils went to King Abdullah who was already suspected by the other Arab states of having secret ambitions, and they rejected them.

The Israelis were frankly antagonistic to them, and on October 3rd the Foreign Minister, Mr. Sharrett, formally rejected them out of hand. The reasons for their opposition were several. First, Jerusalem was a sore point, as they claimed it as their natural capital; then they were expected to give up the Negev, which contained Jewish settlements still successfully holding out against the Egyptians, although cut off, and this would curtail possible Israeli expansion to the south; then they were to give up Ramleh and Lydda which they had just taken by force of arms. In return, all they were to get were parts of Galilee, which they were confident they could take as soon as they were ready. They were also expected to take back into their midst thousands of their enemies, who not only would be antagonistic to, but would certainly be discontented with, the Israeli régime, and would constitute a dangerous and unstable element. Unsuccessfully, the United States urged Israel to accept these proposals.

Neither side had much time for either the truce commission

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or the mediator, and Israel even made a tentative advance to negotiate direct, but on August 10th the Arab League rejected this invitation as they still refused to recognize Israel as a state.

Count Bernadotte's popularity with the Israelis, never high, was at a very low ebb as a result of his proposals, and on September 17th, when driving from Government House to the Y.M.C.A. Building in Jerusalem, he was murdered by members of a 'splinter party' of the Stern Group. It will be remembered that the Stern Group was an offshoot of the Revisionist Political Party, which, amongst other things, insisted that both Jerusalem and Trans-Jordan were to be included in the new Jewish state.

For twenty-four hours no action was taken by the Israeli authorities. Then Ben Gurion roused himself and took strong measures. The Stern Group were rounded up and over 400 were arrested, including the leader, Friedmann-Yellin. But there was no public outcry in Israel over this assassination and little sympathy was expressed. The general feeling was that just another enemy of the Jews had fallen and the only regret felt was that it might cause difficulties to Israeli diplomats in their dealings with other countries. The murderers were never brought to justice and no determined attempt to find them was made. Sweden protested vehemently but in vain. The heartlessness of Israel on this score surprised and upset many of her friends and sympathizers.

Count Bernadotte was succeeded by his assistant, Doctor Ralph Bunche, an American negro, who placed Bernadotte's proposals of September 16th before the United Nations, which approved of them.

During the second truce man-power poured into Israel, and on August 9th the government announced that a programme of mass immigration of 600,000 Jews from Europe was in operation, and that already 30,000 had arrived since May 15th. Aircraft, guns, ammunition and other war material was arriving daily, and the training and equipping of the new national army went on furiously. On September 2nd the I.Z.L. had

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announced that its military forces would be disbanded within a month and its men absorbed into the Israel Army. In its place would appear the 'Freedom Party', which would be purely a political movement, and would be formed by a merger of the I.Z.L. and the Revisionist Party, with the I.Z.L. in charge of the party executive.

Another incident, indicating how the murder of Count Bernadotte was regarded in Israel, happened on October 9th, when the guards at the Jaffa prison were overpowered and the arrested members of the Stern Group were released. Some escaped at once, but the remainder stayed in the prison and held a lively party, to which both the press and the public were invited. This was considered to be a huge joke.

Looking at the Arab side of the picture during this truce, we see a house divided amongst itself, and in spite of an attempt to keep a united face to the world, cracks were beginning to show on the façade. King Abdullah of Trans-Jordan was justly proud of his Arab Legion, which had taken the lion's share of the fighting so far. The desert Arabs had little time for the more sophisticated Egyptians, who aspired to be the leaders of the Arab League, while the Lebanese had nothing to boast of, and the Syrians little more.

On August 6th, in a proclamation to his Legion, Abdullah said, quite bluntly: 'Your army has preserved the holiness of Jerusalem. We and the others went into this fight jointly. We are here. Where are the others? We have fought and progressed, but we have not seen this progress made by others.' The rift was becoming more obvious, and these words left no doubt as to King Abdullah's opinion of his Arab allies.

The Arab Legion was the most formidable fighting force on the Arab side, but it existed solely on a British subsidy. Abdullah, ever the realist, knew that time was on the side of the Israelis and was not keen on accepting the truce, but towards the end of the fighting anxiety had been felt, as the ammunition stocks were desperately low, and the British under political pressure had withheld payment of the subsidy. However, on his agreeing to accept the truce the British paid up, on July 28th,

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the half-yearly subsidy which was due. King Abdullah breathed freely again.

The Egyptians, determined to maintain their status as the leading Arab nation, which they flattered themselves that they were, sponsored the setting up of an 'Arab Government of Palestine', in the territory occupied by them at Gaza. This was at once recognized by all the Arab League states except Trans-Jordan, which would not co-operate, nor would Abdullah allow any official of this so-called 'Arab Palestine Government' to operate in any territory held by the Arab Legion. So, in fact, as Abdullah's troops occupied and controlled the greater part of Arab Palestine, this Egyptian-sponsored government was completely ineffective.

Now appeared a factor not unusual in war, the refugees problem, but this time it had assumed gigantic proportions and had got wildly out of hand. During the mandate both the Arab and Jewish terrorists based their plans on being able to 'merge' into the civilian background when hard pressed by the authorities. Indeed they could not have operated under any other conditions. It would appear that the Palestinian Arabs, under the leadership of the Mufti, had calculated on being able to wage an underground resistance campaign against the Jews in any areas where the Arabs were in the minority.

The Israelis appreciated this fact from the very beginning, especially the extremist organizations, and they were determined that Israel was not to be hampered by a 'fifth column' in its midst. The terrorists operated to this end, even before the mandate ended; their most notorious act was the massacre at Deir Yassin, but there were other instances. Practically, the only exception to this rule of persuading the Arabs to evacuate was at Haifa, where both the Arab and the Jewish administrators and officials had worked together in harmony for many years.

During the first phase of the open fighting, from May 15th until June 9th, the Israelis were mostly on the defensive and only had limited opportunities of carrying out this policy; but, even so, wherever they could they put it into practice, notably

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at Acre. In the next phase of the active fighting, from July 9th until the 18th of that month, when the Israelis were in the ascendancy, they were able to put this policy into practice in a big way. No longer was there any 'reasonable persuasion'. Bluntly, the Arab inhabitants were ejected and forced to flee into Arab territory, as at Ramleh, Lydda and other places. Wherever the Israeli troops advanced into Arab country the Arab population were bull-dozed out in front of them.

This ruthless course was of great benefit to them, as it cleared the territory which was then open for the immigrants to settle in, and it did away with the possibility of terrorist activities in their midst. In addition, it gave their enemies a problem that they had not reckoned with. The economy and administration of the Arab states was certainly not capable of handling, let alone absorbing, such vast numbers of penniless refugees, and if it had not been for the United Nations' Relief Organizations thousands would have starved.

On July 22nd the Israel Government stated that there were less than 90,000 Arabs left in the area claimed for the Jewish state. By the end of October it was estimated that there were 472,000 Arab refugees, of whom half were in Arab-held Palestine and the remainder in Trans-Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and elsewhere. A further 180,000, who were not actually displaced, were deprived of their livelihood by the war and were almost destitute.

## IX

# THE OCTOBER FIGHTING

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As most of the action of the next phase of the war took place in the month of October, it can conveniently be called 'The October Fighting'. It consisted of two Israeli offensives, the first being against the Egyptians in the south and the second being against Kaukji's Arab Liberation Army in northern Galilee.

### THE FIGHTING IN THE SOUTH

The last phase of the fighting, the 'Ten Days' Offensive', had witnessed bitter struggles on most fronts, with the exception of the Egyptian, or southern, one, which had remained comparatively quiet and static. Since the first truce the Egyptian Army had concentrated on consolidating the territory it occupied, being more than fully aware that sooner or later it would have to fight out an issue with the Israelis. If Egypt could remain in permanent possession of the area she held, the Jewish settlements in the Negev, which were surrounded, would eventually have to surrender. Then the Egyptian gains would exceed even those of her rival, Trans-Jordan, and the Egyptian-sponsored Government of Palestine, at Gaza, would have some tangible territory to govern, with, of course, Egypt having political supremacy and influence in the new 'Arab Palestine'.

The area occupied by the Egyptian troops consisted roughly of three 'strips', each along main roads and joined together. These were: first the 'coastal strip' from Rafah, on the frontier, through Gaza, northwards to Isdud, along the road and the

## THE OCTOBER FIGHTING

railway, which the Egyptians had put in order and were using to bring up their supplies. Second there was the 'inland strip', running also roughly from south to north, from El Auja, through Beersheba and Hebron, to Bethlehem, along the inland road. Joining these two strips together was the third, which was a 'cross-country strip', running from west to east along the road from Majdal to Beit Jibrin, through Faluja. These strips were all very narrow, having little or no depth, being only about five miles or so wide at the most, while in some places they narrowed down to only about two miles in breadth. The Egyptians had made no attempt to broaden these holdings, which were tactically very vulnerable, especially in view of their extended lines of communication.

By October the Egyptian Army had been reinforced to a strength of about 15,000, and had received much additional material. Broken down to units, this force consisted of 13 infantry battalions, 2 M.M.G. battalions, 3 regiments of artillery and a regiment of tanks, together with some air support. Gaza was the headquarters of this expeditionary force, and most of its bases and supply centres were around that city or to the south of it.

Enclosed within the rectangle these three strips made with the Egyptian frontier were the Jewish settlements, which were, of course, cut off from contact with the State of Israel to the north. These settlements, which were mostly away from the main roads, still continued to resist successfully and the small mobile Israeli force, operating on the British long-range desert-patrol model, maintained communication between them. The Egyptians did not apparently anticipate much trouble from these enemy-held positions within their midst, and left them pretty much alone, perhaps in the belief that they would eventually be starved out and have to surrender. In the periods of active fighting the Israelis had supplied them by air by night, and also men and supplies had been occasionally filtered through the Egyptian lines, which never managed effectively and completely to 'seal off' this Negev pocket. During the truces, under United Nations' arrangements convoys of sup-

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plies and necessities reached the besieged Israelis from time to time.

The only practicable 'north-south' road by which the Negev pocket could be supplied ran from Israeli-held Karatiya, just to the north-west of Faluja, south to Huleiqat, which was in Egyptian hands. Therefore it could be used only with their consent. On the other hand, the Egyptians required the use of the 'west-east' road to supply their troops to the north in the area of Beit Jibrin and Bethlehem. These two vital roads intersected a little to the west of Faluja, the actual cross-roads being under fire from both the Israelis and the Egyptians.

The United Nations' truce commission, trying to find an equitable solution, decreed that the Egyptians should use their 'east-west' road for six hours each day, and that the Israelis should use their 'north-south' road for the other six hours. This was agreed to by the Egyptians on the condition that the Israelis did not supply or reinforce their settlements by air during the truce. This arrangement worked only spasmodically and soon broke down, the Egyptians refusing to let the Israeli convoys pass through Huleiqat. In retaliation, the Israelis shelled the cross-roads, thus hampering the Egyptian communications along their 'east-west' road.

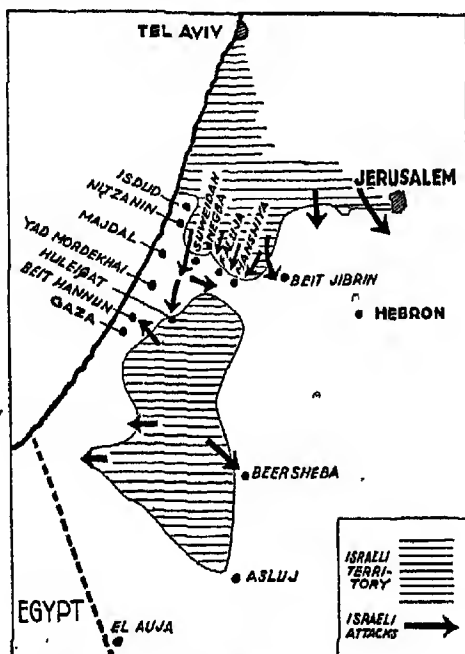
Lack of supplies for their Negev settlements, together with the fact that there was a pretty strong indication abroad that a final armistice agreement would be negotiated on the basis of territory actually occupied by the combatants, prompted the Israelis to take the initiative. Mr. Sharrett, the Foreign Minister, was very much against the resumption of hostilities, but the Israeli Army chiefs, exultant at the throb of power of the newly-forged war machine under their hands, were eager for another attempt. The Prime Minister, Ben Gurion, hesitated but was eventually persuaded, and he allowed the army to put into effect Operation 'Ten Plagues', the object of which was to open up the Negev.

For this operation about 15,000 men were mustered, the backbone of which was the Palmach, which comprised about half the force and was now in fact a full division of three



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brigades. Operation 'Ten Plagues' was commanded by Colonel Alon. While the Palmach were engaged on this operation Ben Gurion, in the last of his moves to unite the army forces, abolished its special headquarters' set-up.



Operation 'Ten Plagues'. 15th to 21st October

§ The plan of campaign was to cause several diversions along the extended Egyptian lines and then to direct the full weight of the main attacking force to breaking through the fortified enemy front between Majdal and Beit Jibrin. It was intended to cut off the Egyptian supplies, block their lines of retreat and to hit at their administrative centres and communications.

The break-through itself was a formidable task, as the Egyptian line of defence in that area was well laid out and consisted

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of a series of strong points, well protected by field works and other obstacles, which were covered by both artillery and mortar defensive fire. It was clear that the Israelis would have to take one or more of these strong points to get through. The element of surprise would be to some extent lost, as they were being forced to attack where the enemy expected them, but this drawback was offset by the narrowness of the Egyptian positions and the fact that they were tied down to static warfare.

In September the Israelis occupied a number of small hills bordering the road to the east of Faluja, and on the 29th of that month they took possession of some tactically valuable heights fairly close to the main Faluja position. Realizing that these preliminary moves were but a prelude to a major offensive, the Egyptians put in several local attacks to try and dislodge them, but without success, the Israelis managing to hold on to what they had taken. An airlift was put into operation, and men and material were flown into the Negev to strengthen the garrison already there. In addition, armoured vehicles, jeeps and other equipment were filtered through the Egyptian lines by night.

In spite of the acute state of tension which had been reached by this time, the Israelis tried to send a convoy through to their Negev settlements. This was attacked by the Egyptians, several of the vehicles were set on fire and it had to withdraw again, but it provided an excuse to put into motion Operation 'Ten Plagues'. Accordingly, in the late afternoon of October 15th, the Israeli Air Force, which had concentrated for the purpose, heavily attacked Egyptian airfields and bases, the aim being to establish from the very beginning complete air supremacy and to neutralize the enemy air force. They succeeded in establishing and maintaining air supremacy, but were only partly able to neutralize the Egyptian Air Force, which once it got over the initial shock and setback, recovered quickly and continued to operate throughout, although on a more restricted scale than formerly.

That night a strong column, with armour supporting it, advanced to just south of Beit Jibrin, occupied several adjacent hills and cut the Bethlehem-Faluja road. From 'inside' the

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Negev several commando-type attacks were made, the chief being in the region of Beit Hannun, near Gaza on the coastal strip. Here the Israelis forced their way to within firing distance of the coastal road, thus hindering the flow of supplies and reinforcements. Large numbers of Egyptian troops had to be diverted from the main battle front, which was, of course, in the Faluja area, to counter this threat. Other raids were made on El Arish, Kfar Yunis and Rafah, where bridges and the railway line were blown up.

The next move was at dawn on the 16th, when the Israeli column which had cut the road between Beit Jibrin and Faluja mounted an attack upon an Egyptian strong-point near the village of Iraq El Manshiya. This ran into well-ranged artillery fire, which put many of the Israeli tanks out of action and broke the infantry assault up. The Egyptian shooting was good and the Israeli casualties were heavy. By mid-morning, after being unable to make any headway at all, the attack was called off and the Israelis withdrew, the honours of the opening battle of Operation 'Ten Plagues' going to the Egyptians.

Checked in his attempt to break through at Manshiya, Colonel Alon next turned his attention and his force to the ground near Iraq Suweidan on the other side of Faluja. Here, the Egyptian defence was based on a police fortress, and there were two prominent heights, one to the north of it and one to the south.

On the night of October 16th-17th the Israelis blocked the road on either side of Suweidan, and two columns of Palmach troops moved against the two commanding heights. After severe hand-to-hand fighting, the column assaulting the southern position was successful but the other column was unable to make good the northern height. More assaults were also unsuccessful, after which the northern column turned and joined forces with the Israeli column to the south. Together they occupied the area around the southern height. Fierce fighting in the darkness had taken place practically throughout the whole night, and the Egyptian soldier proved that he was a very brave and stubborn fighter in defence.

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On the 17th the Egyptians, in their efforts to drive back the Israelis, put in many counter-attacks all along the line, but Colonel Alon's men managed to hold on to all the territory they had taken. But it was no easy matter and it was touch and go in many places. The Egyptians had certainly given him something to think about. By dusk on that day, the 17th, the position was that while the Egyptians were denied the use of their 'east-west' road the Israelis had not yet managed to force a way through the enemy lines into the Negev.

Farther to the north, on the same day, as a diversion another small Israeli force made an attack on the Egyptian positions in the Judean Hills to the south-east of Jerusalem.

To the south the Egyptian strong point of Huleiqat barred their way and the Israelis were faced with either having to mount a frontal attack on it or to force their way through at some other point to the east so that it could be by-passed. Colonel Alon spent the 18th and the 19th probing the enemy defences to find a weak spot but without much result. The Egyptians were strong in defence, being firmly ensconced in good positions and supported by ample fire power. Also, they were very active in local counter-attacks.

When his probing found no suitable weak point, Colonel Alon decided to go all out against Huleiqat, and on the night of the 19th-20th he mounted a strong attack. After a desperate struggle, his men took it and by dawn they were through the Egyptian defensive belt. At last he had managed to force a 'corridor' into the Negev, where the Jews had been practically besieged since November 1947. True, the 'corridor' was a narrow and precarious one at that moment, but it was a gap, and the Israelis set to work to widen it.

In his efforts to do this, Colonel Alon moved first of all to the east, and made a determined but unsuccessful attempt to turn the Egyptian line. The enemy stood firm at all points from the police fortress at Suweidan in the west to Manshiya on the east. This stretch of line, about five miles in length and little more than a mile in depth, developed into an isolated island of resistance, and became known as the 'Faluja pocket'. It was

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held mainly by Sudanese troops, of which there were about 2,500, and was commanded by a Sudanese officer. As the east-west road proper was impassable to the defenders of the Faluja pocket, being under fire from the Israelis, they constructed an emergency track, more under cover, by means of which they were able to maintain communication within the Faluja pocket itself.

Between October 19th and 22nd six Israeli assaults were made on Suweidan, all without success, the Sudanese troops beating them back each time. Even though completely surrounded, heavily outnumbered and under continual fire, the Sudanese commander rejected all invitations to surrender. The behaviour of the men under him justified his confidence in them and they stuck to their guns admirably.

Once Colonel Alon had broken through at Huleiqat, the only link that connected the Egyptian-held Bethlehem sector with its H.Q. at Gaza was the inland road, which ran via Asluj, Beersheba and Hebron. Beersheba was garrisoned by about 500 men, and in addition had some light artillery for its defence. On both the 19th and the 20th heavy air raids were made on this town to soften it up for an assault. Then a part of the original force that had broken through into the Negev from the north at Huleiqat was rushed eastwards to the Israeli settlement of Mishmar Hanagev, which was about ten miles north-west of Beersheba, where it joined forces with a small detachment from the settlement itself.

On the same night, the 20th-21st, this combined force set out to take Beersheba. At the same time a diversionary attack was made on the town from the south. The Egyptian garrison appeared to be taken by surprise and, after a resistance lasting only five hours, surrendered about dawn on the 21st. This put the Israeli troops firmly astride the Asluj-Hebron road, thus blocking the Egyptian supplies to the north.

A considerable number of Egyptians from various units and in various stages of demoralization remained in the Hebron area for some months, cut off from the possibility of retreat to Egypt and they never engaged in further hostilities. When Glubb

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Pasha appreciated the extent of the defeats of the Egyptians around the Faluja sector, he formed a mixed column of armoured cars and lorried infantry, which passed round to the east of Jerusalem and moved down to the Hebron district to do what it could to save the situation.

Already, the Israelis had made an indentation into the coastal strip near Beit Hannun. Now, on October 22nd, they forced their way further in, taking the village of Beit Hannun and cutting both the road and the railway. However, they were unable to fight their way right through to the sea, and although Egyptian communications between Gaza and their positions to the north of that town were seriously dislocated, they managed to retain a hold on a narrow strip of seashore, along which was maintained a trickle of supplies. As an additional means of communication, full use was made of the sea, and the Egyptian Navy came into the picture. But the newly-formed Israeli Navy intervened and a small naval action in that area resulted in which the Egyptians lost three small ships.

This wedge, driven into the coastal strip at Beit Hannun, although not completely cutting off the troops to the north, severely delayed and hampered the Egyptians who, realizing the seriousness of the situation, began to withdraw southward. Isdud was evacuated on October 27th and on November 5th Majdal was also abandoned without a shot being fired. This withdrawal restored to Israel two settlements that the Egyptians had taken from her by battle, Yad Mordekhai and Nitzanin.

While these operations in the Negev were in progress, another Israeli column, from Hartuv, near the Jerusalem-Ramleh railway line, moved southwards and eastwards, clearing the country as it advanced. Its task was to widen the narrow Israeli-held strip of territory connecting Tel Aviv with New Jerusalem and then move on to Hebron. Pushing south, this force occupied all the villages as far as Beit Jibrin, and then it turned eastward towards the Jerusalem-Hebron road, where it bumped into the Arab Legion armoured column at a point about 7 kilometres to the east of Beit Jibrin. A sharp battle ensued, lasting for

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several hours, in which the Israeli column suffered a 'bloody nose', causing it to withdraw back to Beit Jibrin, leaving some equipment behind.

In this short, swift offensive, away from the main fighting, the Israelis had occupied all the Southern Judean Hill area, which then acted as a bulwark against further Arab attacks from the east and the south, as well as substantially widening their Tel Aviv-Jerusalem 'corridor'. Most of the railway line was now in their hands. Making good use of this newly-won territory, they constructed an alternative route, called the 'Road of Valour', which ran from the coast to Jerusalem, but farther south than the original 'Burma Road' diversion that had been constructed merely to by-pass, and was in dangerous proximity to, Arab-held Latrun. The 'Road of Valour' was formally opened in December 1948.

Since the fighting in the south against the Egyptians had broken out, the new mediator, Doctor Bunche, made every effort to bring about a cessation of hostilities. The United Nations' Security Council ordered a 'cease-fire', but the terms of this order were extremely vague, and much was left to the mediator on the spot to arrange. In fact the fighting began to run down and Bunche was able to control it to some extent.

The mediator then demanded that the Israelis withdraw behind a line running from Majdal to Beit Jibrin, which they flatly refused to do. He also ordered that Beersheba be demilitarized and returned to the Arabs. There was a lot of haggling about these two points, and eventually, on November 19th, the Israeli Government announced that all their forces which had entered the Negev after October 14th had been withdrawn. But in practice this meant little, as Israeli troops had been there before that date. In fact, nothing changed at all, and they firmly held on to all the territory they had taken from the Egyptians, including Beersheba.

Summing up: Operation 'Ten Plagues', under the able direction of Colonel Alon, had been almost a complete success. In about a week he had broken the northern Egyptian front and pressed the enemy back a considerable distance. The result

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was that the whole of the northern Negev was in Israeli hands. Only the Faluja pocket still defied him. At the end of the fighting, the Egyptian position was like a U-shaped piece of territory, with the left, northern tip about six miles north of Gaza, running from there to Rafah, on to Asluj and then northwards again almost to Beersheba.

Although completely surrounded, the Faluja pocket continued to hold out defiantly, but its perimeter was gradually curtailed. After some fighting, on November 8th, its eastern bastion, Suweidan, surrendered, and the pocket was then reduced to an area about three miles in width and about a mile in depth. But it still stood fast.

The reasons for the Israeli successes were several. The opposing sides were roughly about equal in numbers, but Colonel Alon had a mobile force, with both armour and artillery as well as aircraft to support him. A large proportion of his men he used as 'mounted infantry', and they were quickly carried in jeeps to wherever they were most urgently needed. The Palmach division, whose morale was good and which had reached a fairly high degree of training, was the mainstay of the attack.

Matched against this mobile force were the Egyptians, immobilized on a very long, shallow front. To be able to choose both the time and place to concentrate his troops for the initial break-through, offset, to some extent, the lack of that valuable element, surprise. Tactically, the Israelis were in a good position, as nowhere was the Egyptian defensive line any deeper than five miles. Also, the Egyptian 'northern front' proper, that is from Majdal to Beit Jibrin, where they broke through, was sandwiched between two independent Israeli forces. These were Colonel Alon's, which was pressing from the north, and that of the reinforced mobile column 'inside' the Negev, which was pushing from the south.

There was excellent co-operation between all arms, and the commander had full control all the time, which enabled him to switch quickly from one point to another as the situation demanded. When the break-through at Manshiya did not succeed,



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for example, he moved the weight of his attack farther to the west. A fine example of the correct use of 'mounted infantry' was when a part of the force that had battered its way through the Egyptian lines at Huleiqat, at dawn on October 20th, mounted on jeeps, moved across to Mishmar Hanagev, a distance of about thirty miles, to take part in an attack on Beer-sheba that night.

The Egyptian reverses can, by and large, be put down to the fact that their defence was static and their system of command and communication indifferent. The 'fog of war' descended on the fighting troops soon after hostilities began and was never dispersed.

Tactically and strategically, their defence layout was not good. Nowhere did they have depth. Nor did they have sufficient forces, suitably deployed, readily available for a decisive counter-attack. Had their northern front been ten miles deep or more and had they had mobile troops standing by to counter-attack swiftly, the Israelis would not have had the success they did. True, the local Egyptian counter-attacks were vigorous, but they were not sufficiently co-ordinated or heavily enough supported to have any real influence on the main battle.

The Egyptian defeats were by no means due to lack of courage or soldierly qualities on the part of the individual Egyptian or Sudanese soldier, who fought bravely and extremely well, especially in defence.

## THE FIGHTING IN GALILEE

While the Egyptians were suffering their reverses in the Negev, the other states of the Arab League impassively sat back and watched. With the exception of Glubb Pasha's move into the Hebron district, none made any move to help. The only other attempt to create a diversion was a feeble one, made by Kaukji and his Arab Liberation Army in the far north, and it was too late to be of any effective use.

On October 22nd Kaukji moved out against the Israeli settlement of Manara, close to the Lebanese frontier, in the

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Huleh Valley, first attacking and taking the redoubt of Sheikh Abed which was on the edge of a mountain ridge overlooking the settlement. This done, Kaukji moved down into the Huleh Valley proper and blocked the road from Manara to Malikiya, which was just to the south. A small Israeli force with some armoured cars marched hastily against him, but was repulsed. Manara continued to hold out but was completely isolated from the south.

After losing Lower Galilee, including Nazareth, to the Israelis in the 'Ten Days' Offensive', Kaukji had withdrawn northwards into Upper Galilee, where he occupied a rectangle of the mountainous area there, roughly fifteen by twenty miles square. The north side of this rectangle rested on the Lebanese frontier. Although unlikely, in view of his previous defeats and reduced strength, to make any major offensive on his own initiative, Kaukji could, acting in conjunction with one of the adjacent regular Arab armies, be a potential danger to the narrow strips of Israeli territory that surrounded his mountainous stronghold. From this high ground he could in the west, in co-operation with the Lebanese Army, descend on to the Plain of Zebulon; in the south, in co-operation with the Iraqis, he could attack the Vale of Esdraelon; while in the east, in conjunction with the Syrians, he could attempt to occupy the Huleh Valley. The district in which he had established himself was an ideal base for such tactics.

His Arab Liberation Army had been further reorganized and placed on an even more regular footing. More armoured vehicles, guns and other war material had been allocated to it by the Lebanon, under whose control it had now been for some time. Nominally a Lebanese officer was its commander, but for all practical purposes Kaukji was the leader still. Obviously, the Lebanon supported and supplied this force in the hope that if there was to be any carve-up of Arab Palestine, she at least might lay claim to Upper Galilee, and possibly more, as her share of the spoils.

The armoured vehicles and other transport which had been given to him were, to say the least, of doubtful value, because of

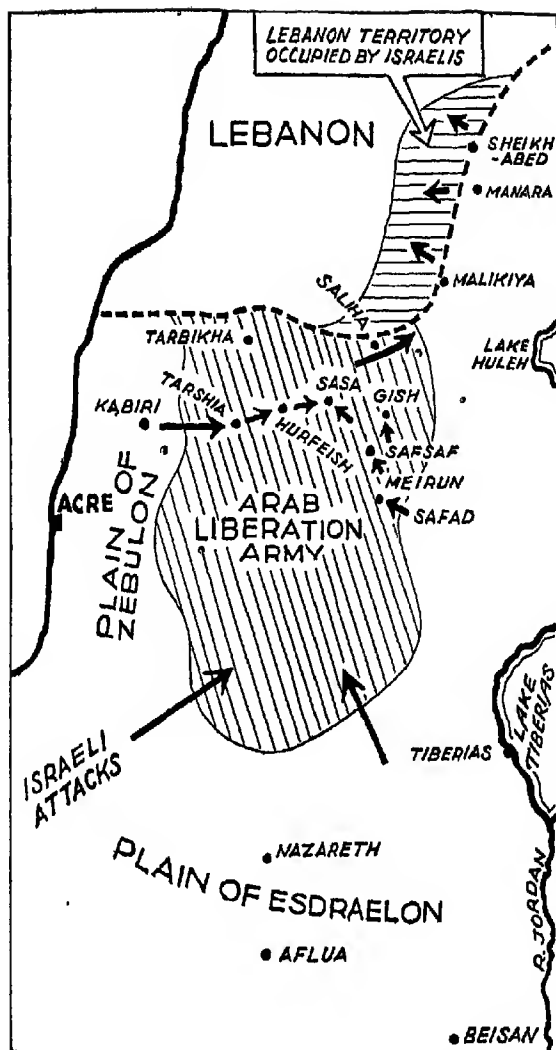
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the general paucity of motorable roads in the area he occupied. Broadly speaking, there was only one north-south road and four east-west roads capable of taking wheeled vehicles. Apart from these, of the existing tracks, a few were fit for mule transport, while most were passable on foot only. The key to the road communications in this region was the cross-roads near the village of Sasa.

The Arab Liberation Army was now divided up into three parts, each called a 'Yarmuk brigade', after the famous Arab Army of the Yarmuk, which took Palestine from the Byzantines. These Yarmuk brigades were distributed as follows. One was based on Tārshia, guarding the west; one was in eastern Galilee, based on Sasa and Gish; while the other was to the south, just below the Acre-Safad road.

In view of its nuisance value, the Israeli high command decided that Kaukji's Army in Upper Galilee must be eliminated. When he descended on the Huleh Valley this decision was doubly confirmed. To do this, an operation, called 'Hiram' after one of the ancient kings of Lebanon, was planned, which had the dual objects of the destruction of the Arab Liberation Army and the conquest of Upper Galilee. Speed was essential, as it would be necessary to crush Kaukji before any of the other regular Arab armies could march to his assistance. Colonel Carmel, who already had crossed swords with Kaukji when he so successfully directed Operation 'Dekel', was put in command of the project.

Operation 'Hiram' was to be carried out in two phases. To begin with, two holding attacks were to be made in the south and the south-west, while another Israeli column was to take Tarshia from the west. Then, under cover of these diversionary moves, the main body was to advance from Safad to capture the village of Sasa, and the vital cross-roads there, where the column from Tarshia was to join up with it. The second part of the plan was to be put into operation as soon as these two Israeli forces met at Sasa, and consisted in the first place of eliminating the Arabs, who it was hoped would be trapped in the 'pocket' caused by this pincer movement. This done,



Galilee Fighting. Operation 'Hiram'. 28th to 31st October 1948

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Colonel Carmel planned to carry on, pushing northwards up the Huleh Valley and clearing the way as he went.

For this operation the whole of the Israeli Air Force was to be made available, both to bomb the main objectives and to be 'on call' to support the ground forces when necessary. Extra armoured vehicles and half-tracks were allotted and reinforcements from the Negev were rushed northwards. Artillery was scarce, there being only about a dozen or so field guns which were kept with the main body. However, the ample close air support was considered more than adequate compensation for this deficiency.

Taking advantage of a lull in the fighting on the Egyptian front, Operation 'Hiram' was launched at dusk on October 28th. During the afternoon of that day the Israeli Air Force had heavily bombed most of the objectives. The diversionary attacks in the south and the south-west went reasonably well and the Arabs were successfully engaged. But they did not completely fulfil their task, as they failed to 'hold the enemy'. Kaukji, anticipating that the principal attack would be coming from the south, assumed that this was it, and he at once withdrew his southern Yarmuk brigade northwards over the Acre-Safad road. In other words, he withdrew his men into the very area where the Israelis intended to drive home their main thrust.

Over to the west, the Israeli column, advancing from Kabiri to attack Tarshia, did not have the same immediate success. Its initial assault on that place failed. Most of the Israeli troops forming this column had been hurried up from the Negev that day and they were all weary. In addition, the commanders had not been able to devote preparatory study to the ground and the plan, a feature which had done much to contribute to their previous successes. The defences before Tarshia were strong, the Arab defenders fought well and the Israeli column, unable to make any impression on them, eventually had to fall back. The next day, the 29th, Tarshia was heavily bombed from the air.

With this column, when it advanced, was a detachment of Druse, who had thrown their sword in with the Israelis. They had been given the task of taking the Druse village of Yanuh,

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just to the south of Tarshia. At first, the Druse of Yanuh welcomed the Israeli Druse, but the news of the Israeli repulse at Tarshia, together with information that Kaukji, with a large body of his men, was marching towards their village, caused them to change their minds. Accordingly, they turned on the detachment of Israeli Druse, who were driven out of Yanuh in disorder, suffering some casualties in the process.

Turning now to the main attack from Safad, Colonel Carmel advanced northwards along the road to Meirun, starting at dusk on October 28th. The clearing of the road-blocks and the mines took longer than was anticipated, so the attack, originally planned to take place during the night, was not put in until after dawn had broken with the result that Meirun was not finally in Israeli hands until about eight o'clock on the morning of the 29th. Once this village was firmly occupied, the armoured vehicles and the half-tracks pushed quickly northwards towards Safsaf, which was taken just before midday. Whilst reorganizing in Safsaf, the Israelis successfully repulsed an Arab counter-attack.

Hardly pausing, Colonel Carmel hurried on to Gish, which controlled a road junction. By this time Kaukji realized the seriousness of the Israeli advance, and had persuaded a regular Syrian battalion to help him at that point. But the Israelis moved very swiftly and taking the Syrians completely by surprise, attacked them before they even had time to settle down in their new battle positions. Over 200 Syrians were killed, while the remainder of the battalion was scattered and driven back. Gish was then occupied, after which yet another Arab counter-attack was repulsed.

Not content to rest on his laurels at Gish, Colonel Carmel pushed his men ever harder, this time towards Sasa, which controlled the whole of the Upper Galilee road system. Sasa itself was a high, fortified position, ideal for defence. That evening the Israelis bombarded it heavily with their artillery and as soon as darkness fell they made a vigorous night assault. By midnight, the village and the cross-roads had been occupied and Kaukji and his staff again fled northward.

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In the west, Tarshia, although it had successfully repulsed the initial Israeli attack, was evacuated by most of its Arab Liberation Army garrison during the 29th, just before and after the air bombardment. Another air bombardment was made at dawn on the 30th, after which the remainder of the garrison surrendered. The Israeli column from Kabiri immediately took over Tarshia, where they found equipment abandoned by the Arabs.

Without waiting as ordered, this column pushed quickly on to join up with Colonel Carmel at Sasa. Half-way there, in the neighbourhood of Hurfeish, it bumped into a large convoy of Arab vehicles. The Israelis opened fire at once, destroying several lorries, but the bulk of the convoy managed to get away northwards and the majority of the Arabs were able to make their way independently over the Lebanese frontier. At noon on the 30th this column reached Sasa, and so ended the first phase of Operation 'Hiram'.

The area to the south of Sasa, previously occupied by Kaukji, became an 'Arab pocket', but not a dangerous one as almost at once the villagers began to put out white flags, while the Arab Liberation Army soldiers and the various other irregulars concentrated all their energies on escaping into the Lebanon. Although many prisoners were taken the majority got away before the pocket could be effectively sealed off.

Colonel Carmel was now free to devote all his attention to the latter part of his plan, which was to clear the Huleh Valley, but before doing that he sent one column westwards along the frontier road, which cleared the territory of the enemy before it as it advanced, taking in its stride the important village of Tarbikha. With the remainder of his forces, Colonel Carmel then moved along the same frontier road, but in the opposite direction, that is to the north-east, first taking the village of Saliha and then occupying Malikiya, the frontier post. Simultaneously, Israeli troops started moving westward from the Upper Jordan Valley and they joined up with Colonel Carmel at Malikiya.

He then moved northwards up the Huleh Valley and the

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Arab forces melted before him as he approached, and the Arab Liberation Army positions around Manara falling to him almost without a struggle. By this time the pursuit of the fleeing Arabs was in full cry and the Israelis crossed the Lebanese border and occupied a stretch of country from the Litani River in the north to Malikiya in the south. The Lebanese offered little resistance.

Operation 'Hiram' drew to a close about six o'clock on the morning of October 31st, two and a half days after it began. It had been a complete success. All Galilee had been cleared, Kaukji had been driven out, the Arab Liberation Army had been broken up and the Lebanon had been invaded. There were hundreds of Arab dead and many prisoners, while the Israeli casualties had been absurdly light. The only disappointment was that so many Arab soldiers had been able to make good their escape before the cordon could be put around them.

The Israeli successes were due to clear and detailed planning, good control, speed, good co-operation and the integration of all arms, including particularly the Air Force, and last but not least to drive and grim determination. From a tactical point of view the only questionable decision was Colonel Carmel's use of armoured vehicles in such country, where there were few roads and where they were so vulnerable to ambushes and 'tank hunters'. Moreover, he used them as the spearhead of his thrust. Tactically, an unsound thing to do. However, in his appreciation, he must have decided that speed and surprise were the more important factors required for his purpose, and to this end they overshadowed the element of security to some extent. He took a risk that came off, but against a resolute and organized enemy he would not have had the same success and his vehicle casualties would have been very heavy.

The reason for the Arab collapse needs some explaining as on the face of it Kaukji, the guerrilla leader, had many advantages. With his 2,000 men in such a favourable defensive area, adjacent as it was to his source of supplies, the Lebanon, he should have been able to have kept the Israelis at bay almost indefinitely. The fact that Colonel Carmel led with armoured



## THE OCTOBER FIGHTING

vehicles played into a guerrilla's hands but Kaukji took no advantage of it.

The traditional Arab dislike of a prolonged defensive battle seems to be the root of the answer to their wholesale defeat, as their individual bravery was never questioned even by their enemies. Generally there was a lack of determination amongst Kaukji's men to stay and hold a piece of ground. They were uncomfortable when anchored down. At the initial battle at Tarshia they fought well for a time, but only for a time. Kaukji, like all Arab irregulars, liked to raid from a secure base in the mountains but had little heart or inclination to fight a formal, set-piece battle, even in the defence of his base. This was where the Israelis won every time.

The modern war equipment which had been given to Kaukji proved to be as much a hindrance as a help as he had little idea of how to put it to its best use. Aimlessly, he moved guns and vehicles from place to place. The morale of the Arab Liberation Army had been reduced to a very low level, and harassed by the ever-active Israeli Air Force, it sank lower, with the result that when the retreat set in Kaukji, even with his influence and reputation, was powerless to stop it.

So ended the October fighting in which the honours, with two exceptions, went to the Israeli Army. The only bright spots on the Arab side were the heroic defence of the Faluja pocket and the action by the Arab Legion mobile column near Beit Jibrin.

## X

# THE FINAL ACTIONS

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**T**his chapter covers the final actions of the war, which took place in the south and were against the Egyptians. Then, to round off the story, the 'Akaba incident' will be mentioned and it will close with the signing of the various armistice agreements.

In conjunction with their October offensive the Israelis began the occupation of eastern Negev, and it will be remembered that, at the beginning of this war, they had evacuated their post near the Palestine potash works, at the northern end of the Dead Sea, to Sodom. Sodom was completely isolated and had to be supplied by air throughout. No attack was made on them and the morale of the defenders continued to remain high. In fact, on June 2nd, they even made an effort to attack a nearby Trans-Jordan police post.

In October an Israeli column, after a difficult journey across country, made contact with the garrison at Sodom. This column then moved northwards, occupying Massada and Ein Gadi, both villages on the shore of the Dead Sea. The terrain in that area was extremely rugged, but it was decided that a motorable road of some sort to link up with Sodom must be pushed through; and after much hard work a track passable to wheeled vehicles, by way of Kurnub, was in fact completed on November 20th.

Some progress had been made in the mediation between Israel and Trans-Jordan, and on November 30th a cease-fire was agreed upon in the Jerusalem area, which allowed for a regular convoy service by the Israelis, to their Mount Scopus position. But long before this, when the fighting began on May

## THE FINAL ACTIONS

Although compressed, the Egyptian Army was still intact, and the Israeli high command realized that it had to be decisively defeated before it was rendered harmless. The Israelis did not consider that it was capable of taking the field in any large-scale operation against them, unless in conjunction with one or the other of the Arab regular armies, but it was a serious potential nuisance and a constant threat to their security. Moreover, the Faluja pocket irked Israeli national pride. So with the object of clearing and making the Negev safer, and also to ensure that any Egyptian threat, no matter how limited, was eliminated, Operation 'Ayin' was put into motion. By the Israeli refusal to allow supplies into beleaguered Faluja, the Egyptians were manoeuvred into starting the ball rolling.

Colonel Alon was put in command of the attacking Israeli forces, and he had under his control roughly the same troops as he had had for his successful Operation 'Ten Plagues', that is about 15,000 men, of whom his trusted Palmach formed over half that number. Facing him, the Egyptians were perhaps able to muster slightly more troops than this, as reinforcements had steadily flowed in during the previous three or four weeks.

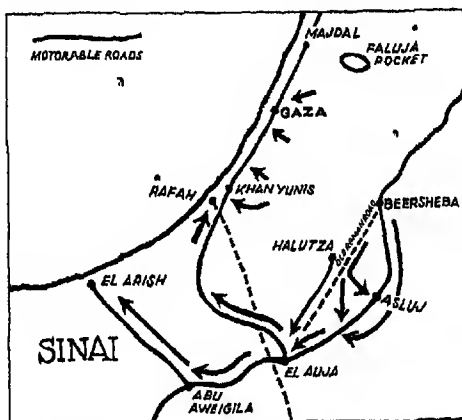
Looking at the main positions of the Egyptians, they were still roughly in the shape of a letter 'U', and were based on the existing roads. The left tip of the 'U' was just to the north of Gaza, on the coast, while the other tip was along the road from Beersheba to El Auja, and stretched to just north of Asluj. The other roads in the Egyptian defended area were from El Auja to Rafah, from El Auja to Abu Aweigila, and from Abu Aweigila to El Arish, which was a railway base on the coast.

Working on the theory that in such rough, desert country the existing roads were the only possible means of approach for a mechanized army such as the Israelis proved to have developed, and also perhaps being influenced by Napoleon's advice that the whole secret of the art of war lies in making oneself the master of the communications, the Egyptian commander based his actual defensive positions on these roads. A series of strong-points were set up along them, and the fire from these defended localities was primarily directed inwards on to the roads them-

## THE FINAL ACTIONS

selves, along which it was believed that the enemy would be compelled to attack. Little attention was paid to depth and the open spaces between the roads was not filled in, or even effectively patrolled.

From their previous reverse, the Egyptians had at least learned two things: the first that their enemy specialized in night attacks, and the second that the Israeli Air Force was now a powerful factor to be taken into account. Consequently, the alertness of their troops by night had improved considerably and much more attention was paid to the camouflaging of their defensive positions.



The Final Operation. 22nd December, 1948 to 7th January, 1949

Briefly, Colonel Alon's plan was to attract and hold down as large an enemy force as possible in the coastal strip, while he first of all moved the main weight of his attack against the tip of the eastern Egyptian defensive arm which projected northwards. He meant to hit it at Asluj and roll it back over the frontier. This done, his next move was to turn to the right and, advancing north-westward, by threatening the Egyptian communications with the rail base at El Arish, he hoped to be able to force a wholesale evacuation of the coastal strip.

## THE FINAL ACTIONS

Operation 'Ayin' began on December 22nd, on which day Egypt declared that she would not enter into an armistice agreement until all Israeli troops had been withdrawn from the Negev. The operation was preceded by heavy raids carried out by the Israeli Air Force on Egyptian airfields and troop concentrations in the areas of Gaza, Kfar Yunis and Rafah. This was followed by shelling by artillery into Egyptian positions all along the coastal strip.

During that night, 22nd-23rd, Israeli troops surged forward and by dawn had succeeded in occupying a series of small hills about eight miles south of Gaza. The Egyptians rose to the bait. Reacting quickly to what they thought was an all-out attempt to try and cut the road between Gaza and Rafah, they moved against this bulge with a large armoured force, and in the resultant fighting the Israelis were pushed out of one or two of the positions they had gained but managed to hold on to others.

Under the impression that another operation on the lines of Operation 'Ten Plagues' was being launched against her with the object of gaining possession of the coastal strip, Egypt called upon her Arab allies to help by creating diversions to relieve the pressure. But Egypt called in vain. Saudi Arabia, the Yemen and the Lebanon all promised to intervene but did nothing. King Abdullah of Jordan did not even bother to reply. As a token of goodwill, the Iraqis roused themselves and shelled a few Israeli villages which were near their positions. That was the sum total of the aid that was given to Egypt by the other Arab countries.

Having successfully focused the attention of the Egyptian Army on the coastal strip, Colonel Alon next moved the main part of his force against the line of enemy positions that jutted northwards from El Auja almost to Beersheba. Anticipating such a move, the Egyptians had prepared strong defended posts along this road down which an Israeli attack might be expected.

The country on either side was barren, rocky and trackless, and was considered to be passable only on camels in a few places. The Egyptian commander was of the opinion that the

## THE FINAL ACTIONS

expanses were too great and the country too difficult for infantry to be used, which was his excuse for not siting his defences in depth. Also, he estimated that there was even less likelihood of wheeled or tracked vehicles being able to travel across country in this area.

However, as has been mentioned earlier, the Hagānah had originally made a photographic survey from the air of the whole country, and a close study of these air photographic maps which they had produced showed the remains of an ancient Roman road which ran from Beersheba almost in a straight line practically to El Auja. This route was recce-ed and found to be promising, with the result that the Israeli engineers got to work on it. Undetected, they toiled feverishly, and they were able to make it passable not only for wheeled vehicles but also for light armour. The reason they were able to complete this task without being discovered was perhaps the fact that the Egyptians were still very 'road-bound', and such local patrols as they did send out into the desert on either side were extremely limited in their scope. But it is hard to find a reason why the Egyptian Air Force did not discover this project. They may have done so but if they did they seem to have neglected passing on the information to the ground forces. The Egyptian troops in the area of Asluj and El Auja had no knowledge of what was going on.

The main Israeli force, which Colonel Alon had divided up into two columns, one a little stronger than the other, started out from Halutza, which was close to the newly-discovered Roman road. Each of these columns was mainly made up of jeep-borne infantry, but both had some light armour in the shape of armoured cars and half-tracks. The half-tracks, of course, carried infantry. So, even though the going was very rough, these two columns were mobile in very bad country.

The larger of these two columns moved along this Roman road towards El Auja, and on nearing that place branched off a little to the north and blocked the El Auja-Rafah road in two places, just to the west of El Auja, by assaulting two of the Egyptian-defended localities in the rear. The surprise was com-

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plete as in both cases the assault was put in suddenly and without warning from the direction of the 'impassable' desert, rather than from the roads themselves, as was anticipated.

The other column from Halutza made its way across country to the road which led from Beersheba to Asluj, and on to El Auja, coming on to it just south of Asluj. It then proceeded without meeting any serious opposition until it had almost reached El Auja. Meanwhile yet another column, smaller but mobile as were the other two with jeeps, half-tracks and one or two armoured cars, moving out from Beersheba, swung through the desert out to the east and, by-passing Asluj, joined up with the other two columns which by this time were deploying outside El Auja.

By the night of December 24th-25th the attacking Israelis had closed in around El Auja and the Egyptian garrison was nearly surrounded, being completely cut off from its northern outposts as well as having the roads to Rafah and Abu Aweigila blocked by the Israelis. At dawn on the 25th the attack was mounted, but it was no easy victory. The Egyptians fought back well and Colonel Alon's men were held at bay for two days, during which time the encircling Israelis successfully stopped all attempts to reinforce the garrison. Realizing the acuteness of their position, the Egyptian defenders withdrew into the desert in the early hours of the 27th. Colonel Alon's troops then moved in and took possession of this deserted post commanding an important road junction.

While this was going on yet another small Israeli mobile column, after following for some way along the Roman road in the wake of the larger one, moved across country and mounted a direct assault on Asluj. The Egyptian position was first of all surrounded, and after some fighting it was taken by the Israelis on the 27th, the same day that El Auja, farther to the south, also fell.

On the coastal strip the Israeli pressure was kept up, and even intensified at points, with the result that the Egyptian defences were penetrated in several places; in fact, Gaza, Kfar Yunis and Rafah became cut off from one another. Thus, by the

## THE FINAL ACTIONS

evening of December 27th, the first part of Operation 'Ayin' had been completed. The main Egyptian forces had been contained, and their armour in particular had been drawn towards the coastal strip. Then the projecting right arm had been successfully rolled back, with the result that the road from Beer-sheba was now open to Israeli traffic as far south as Asluj.

Once El Auja was occupied no time was lost, and Colonel Alon immediately sent one mobile column along the road to the coast, where it joined up with the other Israeli troops who were in position overlooking Rafah. Next, the other mobile column struck out from El Auja along the road to Abu Aweigila, the large Egyptian supply base just inside Egyptian territory proper. Here a lateral road went off northwards to meet the railway at El Arish. Again, surprised at the mobility of the Israelis, Abu Aweigila fell on the night of December 28th-29th, and an Egyptian brigade group was scattered by the sudden impact of the assaulting troops. Mounted infantry in their jeeps and half-tracks sprang up everywhere to confront the bewildered defenders.

Triumphant, and barely pausing for breath, this column turned northward and raced along the road to El Arish. In one bound it reached the airfield at Bir Lahma, which was only ten miles from the coast, brushing aside Egyptian resistance as it crashed forward. So unexpected was the appearance of the Israelis that several aircraft were captured intact on the airfield.

At this point, when the Egyptian Army was reeling under their lightning blows and only a final decisive punch was required to wound it mortally, severe political pressure was put on the Israelis to withdraw their troops from Egyptian territory. This was partly because Britain had a military treaty with Egypt and partly because Israeli troops were now occupying a part of the Sinai, which Britain considered to be under her overall protection. Under the threat of direct British intervention the Israeli leaders complied with this demand, and orders were issued by them, on 2nd January 1949, detailing this withdrawal to take place.



## THE FINAL ACTIONS

Thwarted when the prize of El Arish was almost within his grasp but still out for blood, Colonel Alon, determined to make the best of a bad job, turned his eyes towards Rafah on the frontier. Quickly he switched his plans and hurried his disappointed troops in that direction. By January 6th his men had begun to close in around Rafah and on that day they occupied a cemetery overlooking the town as well as a group of hills to the south of the El Arish-Rafah-El Anja roads. At dawn on the 7th the Israelis began the attack, moving in from the south and the south-east.

But for the Egyptians it was not only military operations that were not going well. In Egypt public opinion was growing bitter at the conduct of the war and news of continual reverses did not help. There was a general feeling that the other Arab states had let her down. Already on 28th December 1948, the Egyptian Prime Minister had been assassinated. Although desperate and with her back to the wall the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty was not invoked, chiefly because the national pride of the Egyptians prevented their recognizing it as they did not consider their country had entered into it as an equal and free partner. The new Prime Minister publicly stated, on January 3rd, that Britain's help would not be asked for in this war against Israel.

On 7th January 1949, just as the Israeli troops were completing their preparations for mounting the attack on Rafah, Egypt asked for an armistice which was granted immediately. The fighting ceased almost at once, thus bringing to an end the Arab-Israeli War of 1948.

For Operation 'Ayin' nothing but praise can be given to the Israelis. The mobile columns, which really were mobile in the fullest sense of the word, were ably and dexterously manoeuvred by Colonel Alon to the bewilderment of the static Egyptians whose defences were completely tied to existing roads. The Israelis proved that the country was not so impenetrable as the Egyptians had supposed. Certainly the discovery of the old Roman road was a stroke of luck but they exploited it well.

As always, when there is plenty of space for movement,

## THE FINAL ACTIONS

desert warfare calls for absolute mobility, perfect co-ordination, a clear idea of the aim, and quick thinking. The war ended with the Israeli Army giving a polished 'Command Performance'.

On the last day of the fighting an unfortunate incident occurred. Five British aircraft which were engaged on reconnaissance duties along the Egyptian frontier area were shot down by the Israelis and this act aroused widespread British indignation. It was particularly regrettable as by that time the opinion of the average Briton at home, who is always ready to applaud a game 'little 'un', was beginning to show signs of turning in favour of the Israeli cause. Had this not happened when it did, in spite of political mismanagement, relations between Britain and Israel might have become far happier much sooner. Vague, conflicting statements by the British, Egyptian and Israeli authorities did not help matters much.

But, even so, the temper of the political atmosphere was changing, and on 29th January 1949 Britain granted *de facto* recognition to the new Jewish state, and on the 31st of the same month America went one better and granted *de jure* recognition.

One other incident must be mentioned to complete the picture as it very nearly led to the resumption of hostilities. This became widely known as the 'Akaba incident'. Already, at the turn of the New Year of 1949, the Israelis had commenced to take possession of the large expanse of the southern Negev, which now lay invitingly open and unprotected before them. This caused King Abdullah of Jordan who, fearing that once this move had been completed, Israel would give her undivided attention to him, to invoke the Anglo-Trans-Jordan Treaty. As a result, on January 8th, it was announced that British troops had been sent to Akaba, the Jordan port just adjacent to the Negev.

Haifa had always been the port for Trans-Jordan but now that was denied to it, leaving only Akaba which was 200 miles south of Amman, partly over earth tracks. Akaba was far closer

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to the Israeli forces now assembling at Beersheba and Glubb Pasha realized that it was strategically quite impossible to defend that port at the same time as the remainder of Arab Palestine to the north, and in actual fact the Jordan Government requested the British Army to prevent the Israelis from occupying Akaba. There was no suggestion that British troops should assist in the event of further fighting breaking out between Jordan and Israel.

However, it was not until March that the Israelis were able, physically, to complete their occupation of the Negev, the main difficulty being the rough terrain and the general lack of passable tracks. Only an indifferent desert route led to Elath, the Biblical port—which was on the Gulf of Akaba close to the Jordanian port of that name—which had been made by the British during the period of the mandate and had been in fairly regular use until this war broke out. This was followed and was found to be fairly passable to wheeled and tracked vehicles. Such obstacles as were met were either dealt with or by-passed.

This advance southwards, which was called Operation 'Fact', caused great excitement and there was terrific tension, not only between Arab and Jew again, but this time also in Britain in case her troops should become involved in the fighting. But the Israelis kept strictly to their own territory, and a clash with British troops was avoided. In the 120 miles of this advance the Israeli column was engaged on one or two occasions by small Arab Legion detachments. All this was happening while negotiations were taking place at Rhodes, after the Israeli negotiators had denied that any such move was intended and it very nearly caused a breakdown.

On March 10th the Israel column reached Elath and on the 12th of that month the British garrison at Akaba was further reinforced. The acute tension continued but nothing happened, the Israeli troops keeping to their own side of the Wadi Araba, which divides the two states in that area.

It remains now only to tell of the various armistice agreements. The first was that signed between Israel and Egypt at Rhodes on 24th February 1949. Briefly, its conditions were that

## THE FINAL ACTIONS

Egypt would be allowed to retain the narrow coastal strip from Gaza to Rafah which she occupied; the Ashuj-El Auja area was to be demilitarized and, in return, Egypt was to evacuate the Faluja pocket, which had held out to the bitter end. In recognition of their gallant defence, the garrison were allowed to march out carrying their arms and with their colours flying. An exchange of prisoners was to begin within ten days. And so on.

The next, between the Lebanon and Israel, was concluded on March 23rd. This was signed at Ras El Naqura, on the border between the two states, and it was agreed that the old frontier, as it was when Britain governed Palestine, would be accepted. Accordingly, Israel withdrew her troops from Lebanese territory.

On April 3rd the armistice between Israel and Jordan was signed. In this agreement, Jordan took over the Iraqi-held Samarian Triangle, and in return the Israelis obtained control of the Hadera-Afula road and the Lydda-Haifa railway. Tulkarm remained in Jordan hands. A demilitarized demarcation line was established between the Dead Sea and Akaba, and again from the Dead Sea northwards to Beisan, except in the Jerusalem district, where the existing *status quo* was accepted. All these moves were completed by July 17th.

The armistice with Syria was delayed for some time. This was due to two reasons, the first because they would not evacuate their troops from some Israeli villages they occupied, as they should have done when Israeli troops were withdrawn from Lebanese territory, while the second was owing to the later general instability of the Syrian régime. On March 30th Colonel Husni Zaim, who had commanded the Syrian armoured brigade at Mishmar Hayarden, effected a *coup d'état* which was to be the first of three in nine months. A cease-fire agreement was signed but normal armistice negotiations hung fire. Eventually, on July 20th, these were concluded and all Syrian troops were withdrawn from Israeli territory. This done, armistice agreements were in force along all the frontiers of the State of Israel.

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Finally, a word about the Iraqi troops. They refused to enter into negotiations, or to have anything to do with the Israelis, and left King Abdullah of Jordan to be their spokesman, but as the Arab Legion moved into the positions occupied by them this in practice did not amount to much. Sadly disillusioned, they then withdrew through Jordan to make their way back to their country.

## XI

# THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

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In retrospect one can trace the main outline of the fighting. While Britain still held the mandate there was the period of underground fighting, the jockeying for position, in which the Arab irregulars seemed at first to have the upper hand but in which the Jews eventually called the tune. In the early stages the most widely-held opinion, heartily subscribed to by many of the Arab countries, was that in a clash the Arabs would have an easy 'walk-over', and that as soon as the British troops left, the Jews would either be massacred or driven into the sea. Only a few shrewd observers, realizing the depths of Jewish organization and planning and the stiffness of their morale, saw the flaws in this theory. King Abdullah and his government, however, were more alive to the Jewish potential and did not enter into the fray in such a light-hearted spirit.

With the ending of the mandate the Arab invasion proper began, and for about four weeks the Israelis stood with their backs to the wall, fighting desperately with only small arms in their hands and supported with home-made mortars. By sheer grit and determination, they generally managed to hold their ground against the regular Arab armies that had marched against them.

Then, after a short truce, came the 'Ten Days' Offensive', which not only opened the eyes of the watching world and confounded the critics but severely shook Arab complacency. The Israeli Army, now with armour, artillery and aircraft at its disposal, drove at the invaders everywhere, forcing them back in

## THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

many places. This was a short, sharp round, and with it the war technically ended.

But after that taste of victory the eager, triumphant Israeli Army launched three separate operations against their enemies, all of which had outstanding success. First, Operation 'Ten Plagues' forced the Egyptians back in the south, then Operation 'Hiram' cleared Kaukji and his irregulars out of Galilee, and finally Operation 'Ayin' pushed part of the Egyptian Army back over its own frontier into the Sinai.

A few landmarks seem to stand out, the first of which was the rebirth of the Jewish fighting soldier and his appearance on a modern battlefield under his own national flag. The burning intensity of the Israeli fighting men, reminiscent of the zealots of old, unsettled their enemies and surprised observers.

Another feature was the failure of the Arabs to join together in a Holy War against the infidel. For centuries they had been divided amongst themselves by rivalries and feuds, but it was expected that the call of Islam would unite them against Israel. But this did not materialize and their common religion was apparently not strong enough to persuade them to sink their differences and to curb the personal ambitions of the various powerful Arab personalities. The malignant figure of the Mufti of Jerusalem hovered menacingly in the background while in the foreground Abdullah held the centre of the stage. Egypt, allied with Ibn Saud, Abdullah's lifelong enemy, strove anxiously for prestige and power, to substantiate her claim to be the leading state in the Arab world.

The inaction of the Arab troops was another surprise. So much had been expected. It was, of course, well known that the easy-going Arab irregular, the romantic 'desert raider' of popular fiction, liked to fight for a day or two and then to retire and 'coffee house', but it was confidentially anticipated that the regular troops, trained on European lines, would do much better. But the trials of active service only exposed the weaknesses, limitations, inefficiency and often corruption of the various regular armies of the Arab states. The Arab Legion, led and trained by Glubb Pasha, was an outstanding exception.

## THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

• In strategy and tactics the basic principles of war have remained roughly the same throughout the ages, local conditions and means available merely causing some to be emphasized to the detriment of others whenever occasion demanded. Constantly in wars, big and small, the basic lessons are reiterated. This war was no exception, and whilst no new principles or tactics were evolved, the value of certain common-sense maxims was again illustrated.

As we have seen, movement and attacks by night, always sound policy by forces of inferior strength, particularly against an over-confident enemy, met with success. The accepted strategy of the indirect approach, so obvious and so-simple once the lesson has been driven home, had to be painfully learnt by the Israelis before Latrun, but once they had mastered the technique much of their success was due to skilful use of it. The full value of mobility was quickly appreciated by the young Israeli commanders. Lack of it contributed heavily to the general Arab failures.

Perhaps a most significant feature, one not fully assimilated by the gigantic armies of the modern powers, was the use of 'mounted infantry'. Properly handled, mounted in jeeps and half-tracks, they were worth their weight in gold against a static enemy. Lastly, the keynote of success in battle is offensive action, continually and constantly. No campaign can be won without it. This was vividly brought out in the Israeli-Arab War. The fact that the Israelis fought on largely interior lines of communication was, of course, a big asset to them.

The refugee problem must be mentioned, as many Israeli sympathizers were appalled at the ruthless way in which the Arab inhabitants were ousted from their homes and driven before the advancing armies, and this caused many twinges of conscience in the Western World. The Israelis made no excuse for it as it was all part of their plan for the reconquest of their 'Promised Land', in which there was no room for large, hostile alien groups. It must be remembered that they were fighting for their life and their very existence, and constantly at the back of their minds was the thought of the millions of Jews who had



## THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

perished in Europe during the Second World War. The Arabs in adversity could retire to their deserts, but the Israelis had nowhere to go.

Another lesson is the comparative valuelessness of irregular forces, be they Arab Liberation Army or Jewish terrorist organizations. Such organizations always get a big write-up but seldom do very much to justify their existence; nor can they be relied upon in adversity.

The rising tension between Russia and the West largely overshadowed the course of this war and more publicity was given to the underground activities of the Jews during the period of the mandate in the world press and on the radio than was given to the much more commendable campaigns carried out by the new Israeli Army. Again, 1948 was election year in America, and the fact that there was a large Jewish vote to be wooed, undoubtedly had much to do with the support, both moral and material, that was given to Israel.

Only a naïve optimist could pretend that the future is bright. A few facts are inescapable.

First, there is Israel, a new state, vitally alive, with a population of just under two million, all fit and healthy, with an extremely high proportion of young people, industriously engaged in expanding, reclaiming land and building, constantly urging Jews from abroad to join them to swell their growing numbers.

Conscription is in force, giving a high quota of trained soldiers, and the individual Israeli soldier is intelligent, patriotic and of a much higher standard of education than is his counterpart in any of the adjoining Arab states. The Israeli Army is organized on European lines and is now able to mobilize quickly at least 16 Brigade groups.

Egypt still rigidly maintains an economic blockade which prevents Israeli ships or goods from passing through the Suez Canal and she also prevents the free use of the port of Elath. Other Arab countries enforce a land embargo on the frontiers of Israel where they are able to do so.

Much was found to be wrong with the Arab armies in 1948, but that was eight years ago; it is only fair to assume that many

## THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

things have since been put right, especially in the case of Egypt, who now may have in fact the number of trained men she boasted of at the commencement of the Israeli-Arab War, or perhaps even more. Jordan, too, has expanded her army, and may now have at least a full-strength division in a high state of efficiency.

Irritating Arab politics like a running sore is the existence of 800,000 or so Arab refugees. This issue is being kept alive by Arab politicians who insist that there can be no permanent peace between Israel and themselves until these unfortunates are repatriated or compensated. But the inescapable fact is that there is nowhere for them to return to. Their old homes and farms are now occupied by Israeli settlers; and who, in turn, is to eject them? Also Israel has little cash to spare to compensate her enemies.

The problem boils down to this: Will an expanding Israel be content to allow herself to be slowly strangled economically, or will she be provoked into making a lightning campaign against one or the other of the Arab countries that oppresses her most?

And will Egypt, whose people sincerely believe that it was only the corruption of the previous régime that caused their military defeats, and who are burning to avenge their dishonour, be content to carry on a passive economic blockade of an enemy who is daily growing in strength? Will the British withdrawal from the Suez Canal Zone increase the chances of a new flare-up?

The outlook is not a hopeful one.



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